



帝都奪還

剣舞18

ブレイドダンス

志瑞祐

Illustration

鯖コハダ

キャラクター原案

桜はんぺん

精霊使いの

MF文庫



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精霊使いの剣舞

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キャラクター原案
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「や、やっぱり、恥ずかしいですね。
学院の制服ではだめですか？」
もしもと太腰を擦りあわせ、
頬を真っ赤にするリンスレット。

Rinslet Laurentfrost

リンスレット・ローレンフロスト







Leonora Lancaster
レオノーラ・ランカスター

「竜皇騎士団」団長、レオノーラ・ランカスター。
竜王様の命で、助太刀に参りました」



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Prologue

Crack—

The crystal's inorganic cracking sound resounded throughout the Demon King's Tomb.

Sealed inside the gigantic spirit crystal hovering in midair was the spirit Iris, Demon King Solomon's one and only contracted spirit, the queen of this Demon King City.

Sacred iridescent light was leaking from the cracks, illuminating the burial chamber brightly.

Inside the crystal where light was reflecting randomly, the spirit Iris sighed with despair.

(Looks like my job as the guard, which has persisted for a thousand years, is coming to an end...) Targeting the Demon King's Coffin, the intruder has sacrificed her own life to deploy a terrifying weapon, thus succeeding in breaking the sturdy barrier of the Demon King's Tomb.

Right now, relying on her own power, she could no longer sustain the seal on the Coffin. In other words, the being that Demon King Solomon had spent the last of his power to seal away would once again awaken in this world.

Crack, crack, crack—

Countless tiny cracks covered the crystal's surface, completely blocking any observer's view of Iris.

Then—

Plink—

With a crisp sound, the crystal fell apart, pulverized.

The torrent of surging light instantly cleansed the burial chamber of darkness.

The tiny and transparent fragments of spirit crystal fluttered in the air like snow.

This scene of sublime beauty was almost evocative of the world coming to an end.

Then—

Amid that brightness, a girl's figure appeared.

It was a girl with ice-blue eyes and brilliant blonde hair.

Chapter 1 - Demon King

Part 1

"...These spirits are relentless!"

"They are most likely following the scent of our divine power—"

Ellis complained in suffering while racing through the streets of the Demon King City like the wind.

The spirits sent by the Sacred Spirit Knights were behind, chasing after them. They belonged to the special operative Ayla Cedar whose contracted spirit Shade Wolf was a spirit collective. As a fully autonomous type of spirit, they were able to stay in the shadows of Claire and Ellis and keep following them while they kept running.

Several minutes earlier, the two of them had encountered the Sacred Spirit Knights in a plaza in the Demon King City. Luminaris was searching for the Fire Elemental Lord's avatar that they had lost track of, whereas Claire and Ellis happened to be moving around with the Fire Elemental Lord.

"The Holy Kingdom has found out we're here."

"Yes, looks like it would be wise to meet up with Kamito and the others then get out of here!"

Ellis turned her body and swung Ray Hawk.

The wind blade generated from the spear tip sliced a chasing shadow hound into two.

However, the bifurcated hound silently melted into the ground, then emerged

from the shadow of another building.

"There is no end to this."

"Collective spirits specialized in tracking ability, what a pain..."

"I was chased by that shadow hound during the final round on Ragna Ys. Looks like fate has brought us together again."

The hound attacked from above. This time, Claire intercepted it using Flametongue.

With the sound of air being torn apart, the hound was instantly burned to nothing.

(...This kind of pursuit is to the enemy's advantage. This is bad.) Without even glancing at the shadow that had been turned to charcoal, Claire silently pondered. It was quite likely that the knights under Luminaris' command were lying in wait ahead of time at the exit of this road.

Given Claire and her companions' current level, they could probably hold their own in a fight against Luminaris or the spirit knights of the Holy Kingdom. However, fighting so many of them at the same time would still be too challenging.

(That being said, we can't use Ellis' wind magic to fly either—) That would end up playing into enemy hands, since the Sacred Spirit Knights included a couple professional snipers.

"Seriously, where has Kamito gone off to at a time like this!?"

"I really doubt that Kamito has been caught by the Holy Kingdom—"

"This way, circle around the back and capture them!"

Luminaris' command sounded on the main street.

Ahead of them, footsteps of multiple people approached.

"They have us surrounded front and back. What do we do?"

"That leaves us no choice but to break through directly...!?"

Claire and Ellis prepared themselves, stopping to manifest their elemental waffen. Just then...

A terrifying explosion was heard. The ground shook intensely.

"...W-What!?"

"The ground is splitting open!?"

Cracks appeared in stone buildings, which then collapsed in the massive earthquake.

This was not the Sacred Spirit Knights attacking, because they could see Luminaris and her subordinates up ahead in the main road in confusion just as Claire and Ellis were.

"—Claire, we are taking flight!"

"Got it!"

Claire swiftly nodded and Ellis grabbed her arm. Using this moment of confusion would allow them to capitalize on openings in the enemy snipers. What a bold yet accurate judgment call.



Ellis swung Ray Hawk with one hand, producing intense wind that formed a hurricane. The two girls instantly passed over the roofs of buildings and flew.

Released by the snipers, arrows of holy light fell like rain. However, because they reacted too late due to the chaos, they committed a serious mistake.

Turning swiftly in the air, Ellis evaded the rain of arrows spectacularly.

"Turn into charcoal!"

As payback, Claire released a Fireball, blowing away all the snipers hiding in the shadows of a building.

"Anyway, let's escape to the hotel where Fianna and the others are standing by—"

"Yes, but what was the earthquake just now...?"

Ellis wiped sweat with her sleeve while looking down at the Demon King City beneath them.

A sudden massive fissure that had appeared across the land, swallowing roads and buildings, looked like it had gotten bigger.

"This is no ordinary earthquake—"

"Yes. All things considered, earthquakes are phenomena caused by angry earth spirits. In this Ghul-a-val, the land forsaken by spirits, earthquakes should be impossible—"

"Ellis, look now! There's something in the fissure!"

"...What is that?"

Ellis looked at where Claire was pointing at.

In the depths of the giant fissure, amid viscous darkness, some kind of gigantic shadow was trying to crawl out.

"Could it be a spirit...?"

"...Come on, what the heck is going on!?"

Part 2

"What the hell happened...?"

Surrounded by darkness, unable to see his own outstretched hand, Kamito opened his eyes.

He felt waves of pain from his head.

How much time had passed since he lost consciousness?

"...Say, where is this place?"

While pressing on his temple, Kamito looked around him.

A small lamp was lit with an ancient silver candlestick, providing illumination.

The stone floor had moss on it with fallen stone pillars.

The paintings on the walls had almost completely flaked off, indicating the sad state of affairs.

It was most likely some kind of decrepit ancient shrine. Kamito could not help but recall the final round of the Blade Dance, which was held at the ruins of Megidoa the abandoned city.

(Wait, why am I here...!?)

Kamito was more and more confused.

His memories from before losing consciousness had broken off somewhere suddenly.

(—I remember I was supposed to be fighting Lurie underground in the Demon King's Tomb.) The assassin sent by the Holy Kingdom to target the Demon King's Coffin was Lurie Lizaldia, the Blade Dance winner fifteen years ago. After an intense blade dance against her, Kamito defeated her.

However, she still had a final resort.

She activated the spirit detonation installed in her own heart, a weapon of mass destruction using the power of spirits, intending to destroy the Demon King's Tomb that was protected by a barrier.

Ironically, she, who hated war and had wished upon the Elemental Lords to eliminate war— Had now used the most terrifying weapon to be produced during the Ranbal War.

(...I still remember everything up to this point. What's interrupted is my memory afterwards—) Back then, what had happened to him, closest to the blast center as he was?

"Don't tell me..."

Kamito thought of a terrifying possibility and broke out in cold sweat.

Even though he survived many perils thanks to Est's Protection of Steel, one would not expect him to emerge unscathed from spirit detonation, a weapon of mass destruction boasting of firepower sufficient to annihilate a city completely once activated.

(—Normally, I'd get vaporized.)

That must be it.

Trying to explain why he still existed, Kamito concluded...

"...I'm already dead, so this place is Valhalla?"

Thinking calmly, Kamito reached such a conclusion.

Valhalla was a resting place for the souls of the dead.

Legend spoke of it as a paradise located somewhere in Astral Zero. However, this was just what the Divine Institute claimed to the outside world. No one knew if it really existed or not.

As a paradise, his current location was rather crude.

(No wait, now is not the time to relax!) Kamito was just about to stand up—
When he suddenly noticed—

His right hand, touching the floor of black stone.

The spirit seal on the back of his hand was glowing faintly.

Were he dead and sent off to the afterlife— Then his spirit contract with Est would be broken, hence the spirit seal should be erased.

Kamito took off his left hand's leather glove.

The emblem of a sword crossed with a moon—Restia's spirit seal—was intact too.

(Oh right, where are they!?)

Kamito poured divine power into the spirit seals on his hands to summon the two sword spirits.

...But there was no response. If the spirit seals were still visible, then the connections should not be cut— "Relax. Time here is separated from that of the human realm."

"...!?"

Kamito heard a voice that he seemed to recall hearing somewhere previously.

At the same time, a man suddenly appeared before him.

"...You're...?"

Kamito had trouble getting his voice out of his throat.

The young man was dressed like a desert merchant.

He was Safian, the Zohar merchant whom Kamito had met in the Demon King City.

"What's going on? Why are you here?"

Kamito stood up, staring sharply at the man before his eyes. Although he claimed to be a poor merchant who was shipwrecked in the desert and ended up in the Demon King City, this clearly was impossible.

...Who the hell was he?

"Do not be so wary. I am not trying to win you over by favors, but I did save your life at least."

"You?"

Kamito stared at Safian with skepticism in his eyes.

"Where is this? We're not inside the pyramid, right?"

"This place is a dimensional gap—neither in the human realm nor Astral Zero."

"A dimensional gap?"

"After the spirit war, the originally unified world was split into the human realm and Astral Zero. At the same time, a few dimensional gaps were formed by chance. This is one of them."

"...So it's a different dimension from the Demon King's Tomb, huh?"

"You are quick on the uptake. As expected of the Demon King's successor. Or perhaps, you asked Iris already?"

"She mentioned that this Demon King City consists of the Demon King's memory fragments anchored in a dimensional gap through the power of the Demon King's Tomb. To be honest, I can't fully understand it, but there are other places apart from the Demon King City that exist in dimensional gaps, right?"

"Indeed. And this dimension is a tiny gap that I can use freely."

As though proud of his crude private room, Safian spread his arms.

"This dimension doesn't seem to offer much. What are these ruins?"

"This used to be a historical site belonging to the Elves. However, the majority of such sites were destroyed in the Spirit War."

...So that's why it had a similar feel to the ruins on Ragna Ys.

"Anyway, let me thank you first. Looks like you really did save me."

"I am glad I made it in time. Any later and you would have been vaporized."

"Yeah"

Kamito spoke softly.

"What happened to Est and Restia? Are they here too?"

"No, you are the only one transported here. After all, it all happened at great haste. However, there is no need to worry about those two spirits. No matter

what, they are the legendary sacred sword and the Demon King's demon sword."

"So you even know about Est and Restia?"

Kamito replied. Safian shrugged and smiled wryly.

"Safian, who exactly are you? By now, are you still going to insist you're just an ordinary merchant?"

"Oh? I thought you would have realized my true identity after meeting with Iris."

"Well, although I have a rough guess—"

Kamito took out a gold coin from his chest pocket and flicked it lightly with his thumb.

"This is coin of the Demon King City that you exchanged for me. I've been wondering the whole time whose face the face on it resembled... If I take a closer look, it's identical to yours."

"Hmm, and so?"

"Gold coins have the highest value among coins. The face on the coin must be the ruler's face. And the Demon King City's ruler is—"

"I see."

"You're *Demon King Solomon*, right?"

"..."

Safian smiled without answering.

Kamito took it as a silent yes and continued.

"But it was only just now when I became convinced of this. In the burial chamber, I saw what happened a thousand years ago. Although the Demon King's face was blurred, at least I can tell he doesn't look like a monster like the legends say."

"Is that so? Did Iris show you everything?"

"Yeah. How you were called a hero, then falling to become the Demon King. I

saw it all."

Kamito stared at the man before him.

This was precisely the man who was known as a hero to an ancient kingdom—The evil Demon King Solomon, who had brought unprecedented terror and chaos to the continent.

"You are half correct."

"Half correct?"

Kamito frowned in surprise.

"I am different from the Demon King described in legends. I am a product of the regrets from the final moments of the human named Solomon Yelsion. A lingering grudge, if you will. A pathetic being without the Demon King's power and can only wander between dimensional gaps."

Saying that, the Demon King, who looked like a young man, laughed in self-deprecation.

...So that was how it was. This man was a fragment of memory as mentioned by the spirit Iris.

Like the Demon King City's residents, was he a bubble-like existence?

From the time when he was still a human hero before he was known as the Demon King— (...That being said, this image is way too different from the Demon King legends circulating in folklore.) Kamito whispered in his thoughts.

From appearance, he looked like just a fine young man.

In the case of Kamito, who was similarly just a male elemental, yet he had been called the Demon King of the Night. This notorious name was totally imposed by popular opinion.

"Then what is your job?"

"What do you mean by job?"

He cocked his head in puzzlement at Kamito's question.

"The spirit Iris is the guardian of the Demon King's Coffin's seal. You have a job too, right?"

"...Indeed. If she is the guardian of this place, then I am the administrator of the Demon King City. Repairing dimensional tears, sending occasional travelers back to the human realm when they are drawn here by accident or intent, *etc.* I suppose such things would count, speaking of jobs."

"I can't believe there's nothing big."

"I have said so already. I wield none of the former Demon King's power."

Safian—Demon King Solomon—smiled wryly.

"But now, my job is coming to an end."

"...What do you mean?"

"This Demon King City is about to vanish."

Kamito was speechless.

Did the spirit detonation used by Lurie cause destruction of such great scale...?

(No, that Bloodstone should be no bigger than a heart—) It should not have the firepower to destroy an entire city.

"This city relies on the pyramid, the Demon King's Tomb, to stay anchored to the dimensional gap. Once the pyramid is damaged, this city would naturally collapse. Moreover, this city was originally generated in an unstable dimension, akin to a building built on sand."

"Then she—"

What was going to happen to the spirit Iris, the guardian of the Demon King's Tomb?

Solomon shook his head. Did he notice what Kamito was thinking?

"Her existence is inseparable from the Demon King's Tomb. Once this place collapses, of course she will vanish and so will I."

Surprisingly, there was no sadness in his voice.

Had he already prepared himself for this day to arrive eventually?

"When Iris loses power, the seal on the Demon King's Coffin will be lifted. The

woman who fought you must have figured this out, which is why she used spirit detonation there."

"...So what exactly is sealed inside the Demon King's Coffin?"

Kamito asked.

According to legends passed down by the Demon King's cult, told to him by Restia, the Demon King's remains lay dormant in the coffin. One would obtain great power should one lay their hands on the coffin.

But—

"How utterly ignorant—"

That was what Lurie Lizaldia had said.

Sleeping inside that coffin was not the so-called Demon King's power— But a holy relic of the Holy Kingdom's instead.

Solomon quietly shook his head.

"—Ultimately, the so-called Demon King's Coffin did not exist in the first place."

"...Huh?"

Kamito could not help but widen his eyes.

"It was nothing more than a rumor spread by the Demon King cult."

"Th-Then what was the spirit Iris guarding here?"

Kamito was stunned.

"You have already seen it."

"What are you talking about?"

"The spirit crystal within which the spirit Iris is sealed, *that* is what she had been protecting for the past thousand years."

"...The crystal!?"

The gigantic crystal, glowing with iridescent light.

It was what the spirit Iris had been protecting till now— Just then, the

candlestick's flame suddenly extinguished.

Not because the wind blew it out. There was no wind here.

By the time Kamito noticed, Solomon had changed to a serious expression, staring off into the darkness of empty space.

"...It appears she has awakened."

"She?"

"—Yes. The sealed Sacred Maiden."

Part 3

"What is going on?"

"I have no idea either—Kyah!"

A violent earthquake was taking place. Seeing the ground in front of them suddenly crack open, Georgios, who was carrying Fianna in his arms, jumped and leaped over the gap.

With the heavy sound of metal, the knight spirit landed safely.

"Your Highness, are you alright?"

Leading the way, Rinslet looked back from riding Fenrir's back.

"I am fine, though I accidentally bit my tongue."

Frowning, Fianna stuck out her reddened tongue.

"Let us exit the city first. The buildings here are too densely packed, which is dangerous."

"What about Claire and the others? Also, we have yet to locate Kamito-kun."

"Those three will be fine. Your safety is of paramount importance, Your Highness."

Listening to Rinslet, Fianna bit her lip lightly.

Currently, she was the symbol of Ordesia's anti-Emperor faction.

She must not lose her life here.

"...I understand. Georgios, sprint out of the city gate!"

<Yes, Master!>

Answering in a hollow voice, the knight spirit began to run, crushing stone tiles underfoot.

"Time to go, Fenrir!"

"Woof!"

No one on the streets paid attention to the two escaping girls. As the city began to collapse, the residents of the Demon King City turned into particles of light and disappeared.

(...The Pyramid is gradually vanishing.) From the knight spirit's arms, Fianna stared in astonishment at the scene.

The gigantic structure, standing where the Demon King's palace used to be situated in the past, was visible from anywhere in the city.

Right now, it was gradually disappearing, turning into particles of light as though it were melting into the air.

What connection was there between the Pyramid fading away and the sudden earthquake?

Amid the earthquake's intense tremors— Georgios and Fenrir forcibly jumped over the bulging ground and continued to run.

Suddenly, Fenrir halted.

"Your Highness, please stop!"

Rinslet called out.

"What is the matter?"

"Something is emerging!"

"...!?"

Grrr, Fenrir growled as a warning.

In the next instant...

An explosion was heard. The ground in front of them cracked open wide.

With a billowing dust cloud, some kind of giant shadow emerged from underground.

ROAR!

"W-What is that!?"

A terrifying roar shook the atmosphere.

From the crack in the ground appeared a wild beast. A ridiculously gigantic beast.

It was a double-headed lion with burning claws and teeth.

"Could this be a spirit...?"

Fianna widened her dusk-colored eyes.

Furthermore, this was quite a high-tier spirit. A rare archdemon-class spirit, seldom encountered even in the depths of the Spirit Forest, no, even in Astral Zero— "Why is there a spirit in a place like this!?"

"I-I have no idea either... Oh no, more are coming!?"

After the lion spirit, a giant spirit clad in armor of ice blades appeared.

Its total height far exceeded that of the surrounding buildings. With dense blades of ice sprouting from them, the arms looked like they could smash houses of stone in an instant.

"Unbelievable..."

"What on earth is going on...!?"

Facing the humongous spirits emerging from underground, the two girls stood astonished, rooted to the spot, unable to move.

The two spirits, slowly crawling out of the ground, glared at each other and began to face off.

ROAR!

Then they roared at the same time—

Unbelievably, they began to fight.

"...! H-Hold on a second, this must be some kind of joke, right!?"

A giant piece of stone debris flew over, Georgios deflected it with his sword.

The clash of fists against claws was ripping up the stone tiles on the ground, creating craters.

"Looks like this path is closed. Let us take a detour."

"I-I suppose—"

While taking care to avoid discovery by the fighting spirits, the two girls quietly made plans to leave.

Just then...

"...Save... me!"

Hearing a scream, so faint that it seemed like their imagination, the two girls exchanged a glance.

"Did you hear that just now?"

"Yes, it was... a cry for help, right?"

Rinslet nodded.

The residents of this city should have vanished already.

Then whose voice was it just now?

Woof woof. Fenrir barked twice.

"What is the matter?"

"Someone's scent seems to be coming from that side!"

Rinslet hastily urged Fenrir to go over there.

Arriving at a pile of rubble collapsed during the earthquake, Fenrir stopped.

"Is anybody here?"

Rinslet called out loudly while explosions continue to sound.

However, she did not hear any response.

"Georgios, dig this up!"

At Fianna's command, the knight spirit began to deftly clear away large pieces of rubble.

After the biggest piece of rubble had been moved away— "Wait, there is someone!"

Fianna cried out.

"...Ooh... Ooooooh... Ooh..."

A girl dressed in a gray cloak was groaning, her leg was trapped under rubble.

"A-Are you okay!?"

"Stay still. I will heal you right away."

Fianna hurried over and directed Georgios to move away the surrounding rubble. As she swiftly chanted spirit magic for healing, the girl's leg injury gradually vanished.

"...T-THank you... very much..."

Despite the pain showing in her expression, the girl still voiced her gratitude.

After all, spirit magic was only able to heal but not erase the pain.

"That leg does not look like it can walk yet. I will have Georgios carry you."

"May I ask who are you...?"

"I am Rinslet of House Laurenfrost."

"Lauren...?"

Hearing that, the girl tilted her head in puzzlement.

At that moment—

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Especially loud rumbling could be heard nearby. An adjacent building collapsed at the same time.

The resulting cloud of dust caused Fianna and the others to cough incessantly.

"Let us chat properly later. We must get out of here first."

"V-Very well—"

The girl nodded and was picked up by Georgios.

Suddenly, Fianna noticed a certain object the girl was clutching tightly to her chest.

It was a book written in High Ancient.

"That book—"

As a talented princess maiden, Fianna could tell from a single glance that this

was no ordinary book.

Exuding a mysterious aura, this was a book-shaped elemental waffe.

In other words, this girl was an elementalist.

"...Could it be that you are Princess Saladia!?"

"Eh!?"

Hearing the name uttered by Fianna, Rinslet could not help but exclaim.

The girl widened her eyes forcefully and closed her lips tightly.

Upon closer examination...

Her face did resemble that of her older sister, Sjora.

"N-No, I..."

Saying that, she frantically hid her face under her hood and tried to deny.

However, Fianna held the girl's hand and introduced herself.

"I am Fianna Ray Ordesia, the second princess of Ordesia."

"The second... princess...?"

"We offer a warmest welcome to you, Princess Saladia."

The girl widened her crimson eyes.

Chapter 2 - Sacred Maiden

Part 1

"...*Sacred Maiden*, you say?"

Kamito's voice echoed within the dimensional gap.

Kamito could not understand what Solomon was saying at all.

"...By Sacred Maiden, are you referring to Sacred Maiden Areishia?"

"Indeed."

Solomon nodded and replied to confirm Kamito.

"The true identity of what lies asleep in the Demon King's Coffin is the Sacred Maiden's soul that had been lost a thousand years ago."

"...What do you mean by that?"

Kamito had heard that it was the Demon King's remains that were sealed in the Coffin.

But no, Kamito himself did not believe in the existence of such a thing in the first place.

He thought it more likely to be a legend made up by the Demon King Cult to reinforce their faith.

However, this man was saying that the Sacred Queen was sealed inside there.

"This joke is not funny at all."

Kamito shook his head.

"After vanquishing the Demon King, Sacred Maiden Areishia should have turned to stone because of the Demon Slayer's curse."

Kamito had shared Est's dream before.

Inside that dream, Kamito had witnessed the final moments of Areishia Idriss.

He had seen her entire body turned into stone by the sacred sword's curse, finally shattering into fragments— "Yes, the Sacred Maiden's physical body turned into stone and shattered."

Solomon nodded and admitted it readily.

However, he continued.

"That stone, imbued with the Sacred Maiden's divine power, turned into the world's purest spirit crystal. Even now, it continues to seal the Sacred Maiden's soul within it."

"...! Don't tell me—"

Kamito widened his eyes forcefully.

"Indeed, that crystal was precisely the result of Sacred Maiden Areishia turning into a crystal."

Solomon declared in a calm tone of voice.

"What...!?"

The gigantic spirit crystal had held the projection of the spirit Iris.

(...I can't believe that crystal is what the Sacred Maiden turned into.) Facing the speechless Kamito— Solomon made an even more shocking announcement.

"She is still alive, simply sealed in the crystal, in a state of deep sleep."

"Say that again...?"

Kamito was at a loss for words.

...This revelation was truly unbelievable.

Under normal circumstances, one would simply laugh off such absurdity.

However, the person telling Kamito this was— None other than Solomon himself, the Demon King of legend, even though he was just a memory

fragment.

And that gigantic spirit crystal definitely existed.

"Suppose what you say is true—"

Kamito sighed deeply and started to speak.

"Why are you guarding something like that?"

Next—

"—In that case, allow me to ask you a question. First of all, what is the Sacred Maiden?"

The Demon King answered with a question of his own.

"What the heck is that, out of the blue?"

"Answer me."

Solomon stared intently into Kamito's eyes.

"The Sacred Maiden is the Demon King's natural enemy. A being created by the Five Great Elemental Lords for the sake of vanquishing the Demon King."

Kamito shrugged in response and answered.

During the Blade Dance's final round when they clashed blades, Rubia had told him this.

The Sacred Maiden was the counter born in response to the Demon King's awakening.

"Correct. I expected no less from my successor."

"Are you making fun of me?"

Kamito narrowed his eyes at the Demon King.

"Indeed, the Elemental Lords had granted her immense power as an elemental. However, Alexandros—the Lord who stands as the leader of the Five—also poured a portion of himself, what you could call a soul, into Areishia Idriss."

"...What did you say?"

Alexandros. The true culprit who had created Demon King Solomon— He had poured a part of himself into her?

"...What is going on? What exactly does this mean?"

"I suspect it was to prevent the Sacred Maiden from disintegrating as a vessel."

Solomon spoke.

"A human's body of flesh cannot withstand the power granted by the Elemental Lords. Hence, the Holy Lord made her into a suitable vessel by merging part of his being with hers."

"...I see."

It made plausible sense.

Like how the majority of people who inherited the Darkness Elemental Lord's power turned into Nepenthes Lore, the excessive power granted by the Elemental Lords would exceed a human body's ability to withstand.

"So that is the reason why we sealed the Sacred Maiden."

Solomon spoke calmly.

"Originally, after the Sacred Maiden completed her mission of destroying the Demon King, the soul poured into her body was supposed to return to the Holy Lord. However—"

"I get it now—"

Kamito finally understood.

Turned into stone by the curse of Terminus Est— Taking the Holy Lord's soul with her, she was sealed inside the spirit crystal...?

"In other words, Iris and you *sealed the soul of the Holy Lord*. Is that what you mean?"

If the Holy Lord's soul that was poured into the Sacred Maiden remained sealed— Then it could not reincarnate era after era like that of the Darkness Elemental Lord's.

"Indeed. As for the reason, since you have seen my past, there is no need for

me to elaborate here."

What triggered the hero, the man from the Zoldia Kingdom, to become the Demon King was all thanks to an opportunity offered by Holy Lord Alexandros, leader of the Elemental Lords.

Creating the Demon King by his own hand on one side— While giving part of his soul to the Sacred Maiden to destroy the Demon King.

Why did the Holy Lord do such things?

"Sealing Holy Lord Alexandros' soul inside the Sacred Maiden was the least I could do for atonement and revenge for bringing devastating calamity to the continent."

Kamito could see a faint flame light up in the eyes of the weakly whispering young man.

"...However, the Sacred Maiden's seal has been broken. By the Holy Kingdom's hand."

"Yes, indeed."

The Demon King nodded.

At that moment, what resembled an earthquake's noise was heard from a distance.

Solomon looked up into thin air.

Following his gaze, Kamito saw countless small cracks spreading in the pitch-black space.

"...What now?"

"The Demon King's Tomb is collapsing. This dimension will soon vanish."

"What will happen when the dimension vanishes?"

"You will be trapped in the dimensional gap, unable to return to the human realm."

"...! H-Hey!?"

"Rest assured. I shall deliver you out of here safe and sound."

Saying that, Solomon began to recite an incantation of High Ancient.

A crack appeared in space with bright light pouring out from it.

"This Demon King City will disappear. Leave as quickly as possible before the Sacred Maiden completely awakens. Otherwise, she will annihilate you, the Demon King."

"...Yeah, I get it."

Kamito nodded.

Although he was quite curious about Est's contractor from a thousand years ago, now that the Holy Lord was involved, it was a completely different matter.

He must meet up with Claire and the others and leave the city as quickly as possible.

"By the way, allow me to offer this to you, my junior Demon King. A parting gift from me."

Saying that, Solomon took out something from his chest pocket.

"...What is this?"

Kamito cocked his head.

It was an ancient silver ring without any decoration.

"A ring used by the Demon King in the past. It should prove handy to you."

"...There's no weird curse cast on it, right?"

"Rest assured, you will be fine."

"What's that supposed to mean...?"

With suspicious eyes, Kamito accepted the ring.

"Next, I have one more thing—"

"What else?"

"Yes, take this too... The famous Demon's Mask of legend."

Out from thin air, he plucked out—

A skull mask that looked a little familiar.

...It was identical to the impostor Demon King mask that Rubia had personally made.

"No, thank you. I mean it."

Kamito resolutely refused.

"Why? This is a legendary-class magic artifact that Demon King cultists can only dream of acquiring."

"Like hell anyone would want something so tasteless!"

"I cannot believe you called it tasteless..."

The Demon King was taken aback... He looked a little shocked.

Putting the ring in his pocket, Kamito stepped before the crack in space.

He looked back.

"Say, what happens to you after the Demon King City vanishes?"

"My existence is akin to a reflection in the water. I will disappear once the Pyramid disappears."

"I see..."

With a mixed expression, Kamito lowered his head.

Solomon Yelsion, the previous Demon King born a thousand years ago.

Kamito wondered if he was being too sentimental... But upon meeting someone like himself for the first time, he felt some kind of camaraderie.

"Please do not wear such a look, *my descendant*. It was a great pleasure to meet you."

"...Thanks for looking after me."

"Not at all. Sending lost travelers on their way is precisely my job."

Facing Kamito, who was smiling with his head bowed, Solomon laughed magnanimously.

After shaking hands lightly with the Demon King, Kamito stepped into the crack in space.

"Walk a different path from mine, Kazehaya Kamito."

With these last words—

Kamito's view turned pure white.

Part 2

"...! This place... is...?"

When he opened his eyes—

Kamito found himself at a plaza in the city, some distance away from the Pyramid.

It was where he had bought the ring as a gift for Est.

Almost all of the surrounding buildings had collapsed. There was a great deal of dust hanging in the air.

He was just about to get up when an earthquake happened. The air shook from a terrifying roar.

(...What is that?)

Looking up at the sky, Kamito frowned.

He saw a red dragon, covered in burning-hot scales, fighting in midair with a gigantic bird with outspread wings.

The red dragon breathed blazing flames. At the same time, the giant bird flapped its wings to create a storm.

This was a fight between high-tier spirits, rare to find even in Astral Zero.

"Why would spirits like these...? By the way, what the heck is going on!?"

Kamito grumbled about the Demon King Solomon who was no longer present.

(At least tell me what's going on outside before sending me back...) In any case, staying under these spirits would be too dangerous.

Kamito stood up and prepared to escape the plaza. At that moment...

His left hand's spirit seal reacted.

"Kamito, where have you disappeared!?"

With a flash of darkness before his eyes, the girl in the night-colored dress appeared.

"Restia—"

"Sheesh, I have been calling you all this time!"

With her jet-black wings outspread, the beautiful darkness spirit landed lightly on the ground.

She was carrying the Demon Slayer in her arms.

Est had apparently exhausted her power during the fight against Lurie.

"...Sorry, I was visiting the Demon King for a bit."

"...?"

Hearing that, Restia frowned in puzzlement.

"Let's talk later. We have to get out of here as quickly as possible."

Another crack opened in the ground, causing buildings at the plaza to collapse.

A shadow resembling a horned giant could be seen behind the billowing cloud of dust.

Apart from the spirits fighting in the sky, there were evidently other spirits running amok in the city.

"...Where did these spirits come from?"

"They are the Demon King's spirits that had been sealed."

"The Demon King's spirits?"

"Yes, some of the seventy-two spirits commanded by the Demon King were sealed here, probably serving as guardians of the Demon King City like the Sphinx. However, due to the Pyramid disappearing, they are starting to rampage."

"...I see. So that's why they're all such troublesome spirits."

Since they had been used by the Demon King, that red dragon and giant bird were surely no less powerful than archdemon-class spirits.

"—Eh, what a sec. Did you just say the Pyramid disappeared?"

At Kamito's question, Restia pointed behind him.

"See. The Pyramid, which even my spirit magic could not damage the slightest, has vanished completely."

"...!?"

Kamito turned his head to look back—

She was right. The Pyramid had disappeared.

Taking its place was a pillar of light, radiant with a holy glow.

However, for some reason, the beautiful beam of light seemed especially ominous to Kamito's eyes.

(Sacred Maiden Areishia—)

While staring at the pillar of sacred light with a strained face, Kamito muttered in his heart.

Est's contractor from a thousand years ago.

The being with Holy Lord Alexandros' soul sealed inside.

Also—

(...*The one who had vanquished the Demon King*, huh?) Did that pillar of light foretell the Sacred Maiden's imminent revival?

With a serious expression, Kamito turned his gaze to Restia.

"Have Claire and the others escaped from here?"

"Who knows? Given the current situation, escaping is no easy task."

"I see..."

Kamito's voice contained notes of anxiety. Even after meeting up successfully, they were still in the center of Ghul-a-val, the Desert of Red Death. Without a sand ship, they had no way of leaving.

(...That asshole Solomon, telling me to leave. Easier said than done! But how do I escape?) Kamito grumbled mentally against the previous Demon King again. Just then— "What's that, Kamito?"

Restia asked him with curiosity.

She was staring intently at the chest pocket of his uniform.

"Oh, this? Someone gave it to me—"

Kamito took out the plain-looking ring and showed it to her.

Instantly, Restia widened her sunset-colored eyes.

"Kamito, isn't that the Demon King's Ring!?"

The darkness spirit with a great fondness for magic artifacts flapped her wings in excitement.

"Kamito, where did you get this from?"

"Nowhere. He gave it to me himself."

"...?"

"Forget the ring for now. Let's figure out how to leave first—"

"What are you talking about!? Kamito, pour divine power into that ring."

"...Eh?"

"Pour divine power into it. Come on, hurry—"

"F-Fine..."

At her forceful urging, Kamito poured divine power into the ring with a puzzled look on his face.

Next, words in High Ancient appeared on the ring's surface.

"What's this? Some words appeared."

"Don't fret. Assuming this is the real Demon King's Ring—"

Restia looked up into the air.

At that instant, something astonishing happened.

One of the two spirits that had just been fighting in the sky above, the giant bird, left the red dragon spirit behind and rushed towards Kamito, gliding straight to the plaza.

"Restia, that giant bird is coming!?"

"Don't worry."

However, Restia remained unfazed, using her hand to hold down her hair that was blowing in the storm.

The giant bird spirit flapped its wings in the air and landed in the center of the plaza.

With a bird of prey's eyes, glowing golden, it stared straight at Kamito.

...Kamito felt that he was going to be eaten if he moved.

"...What!?"

Just as Kamito was frozen in shock—

Restia gently caressed the giant bird's beak and turned to Kamito.

"Kamito, this giant bird spirit, the Roc, is your loyal servant."

"What are you talking about?"

"This ring has the power to control the seventy-two spirits under the Demon King's command. Together with the Garb of the Lord and the Demon's Mask, they are known as legendary artifacts."

"This ring?"

Kamito carefully examined the faintly glowing ring.

In fact, the giant bird spirit, which had been acting out a giant monster battle in the sky just earlier, was obediently standing there as though waiting for Kamito's command.

"So that guy gave away something so precious, huh?"

"If we use this spirit, it should be easy to find little Miss Hell Cat and the others, and cross the desert too."

Restia stroked the Roc's beak. The giant bird spirit cooed in response, sounding surprisingly adorable.

"I'm not completely reassured, but there's no time to hesitate..."

Once this Demon King City collapsed, Kamito and his friends would very likely remain trapped in the dimensional gap, outside both the human realm and

Astral Zero.

Clutching the ring tightly, Kamito gallantly leaped onto the giant bird.

"...Uh, all I have to do is give out orders?"

"Yes."

"Here goes... Fly, giant bird spirit Roc!"

At Kamito's command—

The Roc flapped its wings powerfully, rising into the sky over the Demon King City that was shrouded in dust and smoke.

Part 3

"...! Turn into charcoal!"

Claire's Flametongue delivered a mighty blow to the one-eyed giant crawling out from a crevasse in the ground.

However, the giant spirit did not seem damaged at all.

With a grin, it raised its arm, trying to catch Claire.

"Claire!"

At that moment, Ellis struck the giant's back with the spear tip of Ray Hawk.

Clang! This strike produced a violent scattering of sparks as though she had struck steel with her spear.

Seizing the chance when the giant was distracted, Claire swiftly distanced herself...

Only to see the one-eyed giant scratch its back nonchalantly, completely unfazed.

"Damn it, I cannot inflict any damage, huh..."

Ellis showed anxiety on her face. After clashing with the Sacred Spirit Knights repeatedly, she and Claire had expended a great deal of divine power. Simply sustaining their elemental waffen was already quite a stretch.

The powerful spirits that had emerged from underground one after another were blocking the path of Claire and Ellis. An elemental's power seemed to attract these spirits.

"...Kuh, there's no end to this!"

Panting, Claire spoke.

"Yes, this is too difficult..."

Ellis stabbed Ray Hawk into the ground and complained in a rare moment. After fighting one-on-one against Luminaris and using spirit magic to fly continuously, she was at her limit.

"Take a break first. Scarlet and I will open up a path."

"But..."

The giant spirit caused earthquakes while approaching them.

"Let's go, Ortlinde—"

Just as Claire was about to unleash her ultimate move, a True Name Release...

"Freezing fangs of ice, go forth and pierce—Freezing Arrow!"

Countless projectiles of ice rained down on the giant's head.

With his prided eye shot with pinpoint accuracy, the giant gave a terrifying roar and rolled on the ground in pain.

Claire jumped in surprise and looked to where the rain of arrows came from—
"That was close, Claire."

On a mountain of collapsed debris, Rinslet had puffed out her chest, wielding her bow.

"Rinslet, you're safe...!"

"Hmph, of course. Who do you take me for?"

"Rinslet, where is Her Highness?"

Ellis asked.

"Yes, she is with me."

After a moment's delay, the sound of clanging armor could be heard.

Appearing from the billowing cloud of dust and sand— Georgios, carrying Fianna and an unknown girl in his arms.

"...Your Highness, I am so glad."

Seeing that, Ellis could stop worrying

"Fianna, it's good you're okay... Uh, who is this girl?"

"Allow me to introduce Princess Saladia Kahn."

Getting down from Georgios' arm, Fianna announced.

"What did you say!?"

"What!?"

Claire and Ellis both exclaimed in surprise.

"What on earth—"

"I shall explain later. We must first escape from here as soon as possible."

"Yes, you're right..."

Claire nodded.

Taking a closer look, the giant spirit was about to get up.

Presumably, that level of injury should be quick to recover from.

"Fenrir and I shall lead the way to exit the city!"

Allowing her magic bow of ice to return to dire wolf form, Rinslet jumped onto Fenrir's back.

"Understood!"

She was just about to start running when in that instant...

Claire felt bone-chilling terror and stood there frozen on the spot.

"Claire, what is the matter?"

"Just now, something—"

She was able to notice *that* possibly because of her instinct as a princess maiden stemming from her shared lineage with her sister.

Claire slowly turned her head and looked back.

Only to see a blinding pillar of light in front of her gaze.

"What's over there?"

Part 4

The giant bird spirit was circling in the sky while sparks flew below.

Black smoke was fuming all over the city. Collapsed buildings were falling into crevasses in the ground.

Freed, the Demon King's spirits were apparently having a blast, running amok.

"—Found them. Over there."

From behind Kamito, Restia pointed diagonally downward.

"Where?"

"Look, along the path towards the city gate."

Kamito looked down and focused his eyes.

With smoke rising nonstop, visibility was quite bad.

"They look like they're fighting spirits, locked in a difficult battle."

"Any ideas how to use the Demon King's Ring to help?"

"Unfortunately, the ring can only control one spirit at a time."

"Really..."

Ultimately, this ring only had a fraction of Demon King Solomon's power sealed in it. Thus, its power to control was far inferior to the real Demon King's.

"Roc, land in that vicinity."

Kamito poured his thoughts into the ring, commanding the giant bird spirit.

The Roc cried out and obeyed its master, gliding over while slicing through the air.

"—Kamito."

Just then, Est, who had been sleeping in her sacred sword form, spoke out.

"Your'e awake, Est!?"

"Kamito, hurry and leave this air space."

In a rare moment, Est was speaking with a nervous tone of voice.

"—*She* is awakening."

"She?"

Kamito jumped in surprise and turned his head to look behind.

—Only to see a change in the pillar of light piercing the center of the Demon King City.

(...What the heck?)

The rainbow-colored light contracted into a point in the air, coalescing into a small sphere.

Inside the sphere was a young girl's floating figure.

A girl with blonde hair and holy armor of pure white.

She was holding a sword in her hand.

This was Millennia Sanctus' sacred sword, the one Lurie had used.

The instant he saw the girl—

Kamito's heart began to race violently.

All the divine power in his body seemed to reverse all at once, boiling up.

An uncontrollable torrent of emotion was raging within Kamito.

Instinctively, Kamito felt that this was his fated nemesis.

—Indeed, *fated nemesis*.

The one and only being capable of annihilating the Demon King who served as a vessel for Darkness Elemental Lord Ren Ashdoll's power— Areishia Idriss, the Sacred Queen.

Having shared Est's dreams in the past, Kamito recognized her face.

And standing in that sphere of light, that girl's appearance was identical to the Sacred Maiden he had seen in the dreams.

However, the ambiance around her was completely different.

Est's master in the dreams had displayed human expressions on her face.

In contrast, this girl's face did not show any emotion at all.

"—Kamito, that is not Areishia."

"Yeah, I agree."

Suppose what Demon King Solomon had said was true— What had awakened after a thousand years was not the Sacred Maiden— But the vessel containing the soul of Holy Lord Alexandros.

Just then—

The girl's sharp eyes looked at Kamito—At least, that was what he felt.

(...! We're spotted?)

Instinctively, he felt it.

In the next instant—



The Sacred Maiden casually raised the sacred sword in her hand— "—Roc, evade!"

Hastily, Kamito shouted.

The Roc instantly obeyed and rapidly descended.

In the next second, a flash of pure white brushed past the Roc's giant wing, firing into the desert area out in the distance.

BOOOOOOOM!

Kamito's view turned white.

He felt an overwhelming shockwave weighing down on him.

"...!?"

The giant bird spirit spun in the air, dealt a heavy blow by raging winds.

The Roc flapped its wings hard several times before it finally regained stability.

An intense sandstorm blocked their view of the surroundings.

"...! W-What the heck was that just now!?"

Kamito exclaimed, outraged.

"—Deus Ira."

Restia responded.

"—Annihilation-class spirit magic used during the Spirit War era."

"Restia, you—"

Looking back, Kamito stared wide-eyed.

Half of Restia's wings had vanished without trace.

That flash of light apparently brushed past her wings.

"Are you okay?"

"Y-Yes... More importantly, we must leave as quickly as possible—"

"Yeah—"

With a flap of the Roc's wings, the sand and dust was instantly blown away.

Next, from the city gate, Kamito spotted Claire and the others lying prone on the ground.

It looked like the earlier shockwave had knocked them down, but they seemed to be fine.

"Roc, pick them up!"

Goorooroorooroorooroo!

"W-What is this!?"

Lying on the ground, Claire looked up, unsure what was happening.

"All of you, get on now!"

Kamito shouted loudly.

"K-Kamito!? What do you mean, get on? This is so sudden!"

"W-What is with that bird...?"

Claire and Rinslet were baffled with puzzled faces.

However, the Roc glided straight towards them— Opening its beak, it swallowed Fenrir and Georgios in one mouthful.

"Kyahhhhhhhhh!"

"W-What in the world!? Kyah—"

No sooner had Claire and Rinslet screamed than they were interrupted.

"H-Hey, what are you doing!? Hurry and spit them out!"

Seeing the unexpected manner of retrieval, Kamito frantically slapped the Roc's neck, but...

"Don't worry, the inside of the Roc is connected to a safe dimension."

"...Are you serious?"

"Serious. Let us do everything we can to escape first. We might not be so lucky as to dodge the next shot—"

Restia cast her gaze out into the distant desert.

A gigantic crater had formed where the beam of light of Deus Ira had pierced.

...A single attack contained enough firepower to annihilate a city.

"I guess you're right—"

Kamito poured powerful divine power into the ring. The Roc instantly sped up.

A howling sandstorm blocked their view of the Sacred Maiden.

Part 5

"...So they have left?"

In a corner of the gradually vanishing Demon King City— Staring at the spirit flying out into the desert, the Demon King muttered to himself.

His body was already on the verge of disappearing. Most likely, before the city vanished completely, he would be gone without a trace like grains of sand in the wind.

He looked down at the tiny glowing stones held in his hands.

They were the final fragments of the spirit Iris.

Likewise, she was going to vanish together with this Demon King City.

For spirits with their enduring lifespans, a thousand years was not long.

However, he had enjoyed his time together with her.

The Demon King's spirits, which had rampaged to their hearts' content, were beginning to return to Astral Zero.

As for the knights of the Holy Kingdom, he had placed them in the desert. Although he had no obligation to help them, it was his job after all. With enough luck, they should end up rescued.

At this time, in this city that was supposed to be empty...

"Hey you, what are you doing here?"

A gruff voice spoke to him.

He looked back to see a young man with a dark complexion standing there.

"And who may you be?"

"Huh? Me?"

Hearing that, the young man grinned.

"I am Jio Inzagi, the Demon King's successor."

The young man introduced himself.

"Huh...?"

The Demon King could not help but make a sound in astonishment.

...A poor child with delusions, I see.

"Hey, who the heck are you?"

"I am Safian, a traveling merchant."

"A merchant? What a weirdo."

I could say the same for you. Suppressing these words, the Demon King spoke.

"This place is about to collapse. You should escape soon."

"And you aren't gonna?"

"No, after all, this is my homeland."

"...Hmph. Suit yourself."

The young man seemed to lose interest and prepared to leave.

Just then, the Demon King suddenly had an idea and called to the young man.

"Oh, please wait a second."

"What now?"

"I suppose our encounter is owed to fate. Let this be my gift to you."

"...What the heck is this?"

Seeing him pull out the Demon's Mask from thin air, the young man frowned in surprise.

"A leftover product from my wares. I have no use for it."

"...Eh, now that I take a closer look, this design isn't half bad."

"Hmm, it seems like your sense of aesthetics matches the Demon King's."

"Okay, I'll take it. Bye—"

"Yes."

The young man took the Demon's Mask and very swiftly departed.

His physical abilities far surpassed that of ordinary people.

...Even though the Demon King had no idea who he was, he found the young man quite amusing.

After seeing the young man disappear into the desert— "Very well, my time will be up soon—"

His gaze settled on the glow in his hands.

"—My wish is for what that king took, *my beloved daughter's soul, to find salvation.*"

Next, having confirmed that the faint light had vanished— Like grains of sand blown in the wind, he vanished without trace.

Chapter 3 - Return of the Queen

Part 1

"Sh-Sheesh, what on earth is going on...?"

Suddenly swallowed by the giant bird, Claire cried out in the darkness.

She lit a small fire in her palm to illuminate her surroundings.

She had expected to find herself inside the giant bird's stomach— But in front of her was a luxurious room laid with velvet carpet.

"...W-What is this place?"

"This is the Roc's dimension."

Just then, Restia's voice was heard from above— A spirit crystal lamp installed on a wall in the room instantly lit up.

"W-What happened?"

"If I remember right, I think a bird with a terrifying appearance swallowed us."

Rinslet and Ellis were also checking out their surroundings, unsure what to do.

"Darkness spirit, I demand a clear explanation!"

Claire pointed at the ceiling and said.

"Hmph, you girls are currently inside a spirit under Kamito's command."

"Kamito's spirit? That giant bird?"

"Yes, Kamito had just tamed it."

"Tamed..."

"Nothing less expected from Kamito-kun..."

Fianna sighed poignantly.

"...I have no idea what is going on, but is this safe?"

"Yes, so long as no accident occurs."

"What kind of accident..."

"For example, if this spirit is erased, you lot will end up erased together."

"Isn't that serious!? Set us down right this instant!"

"I don't mind doing that, but do know that we are currently flying over Ghul-a-val."

Hearing that, Claire became speechless.

"...What happened over there? What was that pillar of light?"

"What happened to the Pyramid?"

"None of that is urgent at the moment. For explanations, wait until we get back to Zohar. See you later—"

Saying that, Restia ended the conversation on her own.

"Wait, darkness spirit! Sheesh..."

Claire glared at the ceiling in displeasure.

"No helping it. Our only choice is to wait here quietly."

"Fortunately, this place is quite comfortable."

"Since there is a sofa and a kitchen. We can easily live here for a week or more."

"There are snacks on the shelves too."

"How uncommon. A spirit with a living space inside..."

"Your Georgios can be entered too, and with climate control to boot."

"My goodness, Georgios is only for personal use—"

"Excuse me..."

At this time, a voice came from a corner of the room. It was Saladia Kahn, who had been swallowed without a clue what was going on as soon as she had been rescued.

"Princess Saladia, does your injury still hurt?"

Fianna asked her with care.

"No, it doesn't, all thanks to you. I will be fine after taking some rest."

Maintaining a calm attitude, Saladia shook her head.

Remaining composed in such a situation, nothing less expected from her as a member of a royal family.

"This spirit is headed to Zohar, is that right?"

"Yes, apparently. Please rest assured, Your Highness, we will make sure you get there safely."

Hearing Claire say that, Saladia exhaled and looked relieved.

"The few of you are from Ordesia...?"

"More precisely, it would be Legitimate Ordesia."

"A government in exile, wanted by the Emperor."

Fianna smiled wryly and shrugged.

"Why are you searching for me?"

"There are complicated reasons—"

Saying that, Fianna told her about what had happened so far.

Their alliance with Dracunia. The mission assigned by the Dragon King.

Then there was Saladia's older sister Sjora Kahn dying together with Leviathan, the strategic-class militarized spirit.

"...I see. My elder sister sacrificed her life for Leviathan..."

"Yes. By the time Kamito stormed into there, it was already too late to save her..."

Claire added.

"My elder sister's foolish acts has caused great loss of life to the populace. Thank you all for stopping her. Surely, more victims would have lost their lives had you not intervened."

With a pained expression, Saladia clasped her hands together as though to pray.

"By the way, Your Highness, why did you go to the Demon King's Capital?" Rinslet asked.

"Uh, well..."

Saladia was momentarily stumped by the question.

"Because of the legend of the Demon King's Coffin, right?"

"So you already know somewhat—"

Hearing Claire's comment, the princess gave up and nodded.

"Precisely. I followed the legend of the Demon King's Coffin and reached that place. With the majority of my retainers eliminated by my sister, I was alone without any support. Hence, it was necessary for me to obtain proof of my authority as the Theocracy's ruler."

"Suffering from civil war, the Theocracy's people are wishing for your return. I don't think there's any current necessity to rely on that kind of legend to display your authority—"

"Yes, you have a point. Now that I think back, why did such a thought occur to me, I wonder..."

The princess tilted her head in puzzlement and began to murmur to herself.

"...?"

Seeing her like that, Fianna felt a strange sense of dissonance.

"By the way, Your Highness, I presume you had a bodyguard?"

At this moment, Ellis thought of something and asked.

"Speaking of which, that is right."

Rinslet chimed in.

"But there was no one by your side where you collapsed."

Hearing that, Saladia's face twitched.

"Th-That man is no bodyguard! A mere rogue civilian!"

"I-I see..."

"He abandoned me and went off who knows where! I was a fool for starting to trust him!"

Facing the princess who had suddenly gotten worked up, Claire and the girls exchanged looks, unable to say anything.

Part 2

The giant bird spirit flew easily across the vast desert of Ghul-a-val, reaching the Theocracy's capital of Zohar in merely half a day's time.

While creating strong wind that knocked down rows of trees, the Roc landed in the garden of the Scorpio palace.

Confronted with a gigantic spirit's sudden appearance, the palace guards immediately started to attack. However, the weapons of ordinary soldiers who were not elementalists could not cause any damage to the Roc at all.

Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

Angered, the Roc moved and the guards immediately fled in fear.

Riding on the giant bird's back and seeing the situation, Kamito called out to them.

"Wait up! I've brought Princess Saladia back!"

Some of the guards probably felt curious and halted instantly.

Kamito got down from the Roc's back. Raising Solomon's ring, he commanded the Roc.

"Uh, release everyone."

Hearing that, the Roc obediently lowered its head and slowly opened its beak.

"Hyah!"

"Ouch!"

Claire and the girls instantly fell out from the pitch-black space in the Roc's mouth.

"Sheesh, what was that so suddenly...!"

Claire was so angry that her hair stood on end.

"...Is place is?"

She surveyed her surroundings.

"This is the palace at Zohar."

"Ah, Kamito..."

"We have reached the destination, I see."

After Claire and Rinslet, Ellis and Fianna also arrived outside.

"Girls, the flight wasn't too uncomfortable, I hope?"

"Hmm, it surprised me at first, but it was actually quite comfortable."

Saying that, Fianna stroked the giant bird's beak.

"There was a really soft sofa and daily necessities."

"It was quite nice as long as you tried not to think of yourself as being inside a bird's belly."

...Surprisingly, the girls did not seem too offended.

"I told you so. The Roc is quite a comfortable ride."

In response, Restia commented oddly proudly.

"W-Who on earth are you people...?"

At this moment, the guards with raised spears asked warily.

Next—

"Stop this insolence now. Put away your weapons."

A stern voice sounded from the bird's beak— A blonde girl in a traveler's cloak then emerged.

"Y-Your Highness, Princess Saladia!?"

The captain of the guard widened his eyes.

The guards surrounding Kamito's group immediately put down their weapons and prostrated themselves on the ground.

"I have returned. Henceforth, I shall govern in the place of my deceased royal sister. Make preparations for the coronation ceremony right away."

"Yes, affirmative!"

Hearing the commands of the returned princess, the guards immediately responded and ran to the palace entrance.

Saladia Kahn turned her head back to Kamito's group.

"I am deeply grateful for your help. Please rest in the imperial villa over there for now. I must busy myself with the coronation."

"Thank you for your hospitality, Princess Saladia."

Fianna bowed her head lightly.

Escorted by the guards, Princess Saladia made her way to the palace.

"Are we going to take a break without worrying too much?"

"I suppose, I really want to cleanse my body..."

Saying that, Claire patted off sand that was sticking to her hair.

"By the way, Kamito, what are you going to do with this bird?"

Just then, Ellis asked with slight worry.

Even with wings folded, the giant bird took up almost all of the palace's large garden.

...Although the Roc did not look like it would misbehave, Kamito decided against leaving it here unattended.

"Say, Restia, what should I do?"

"There is no should. It has recognized you, Kamito, the one who holds the ring, as its master. That's why it is listening to your orders."

"I see—"

Kamito stroked the beak with his hand. The giant bird started to coo.

"Uh, thank you for flying us all the way here. You're free from now on."

"Kamito, that is such a waste. The Roc is a high-tier spirit, you know?"

"Even so, I can't just leave it here..."

...The palace guards would probably be scared out of their wits if the Roc kept

staying here.

Also, he felt sorry for using the Demon King's power to restrain spirits.

Kamito tapped on the beak. The Roc suddenly stood up and spread its giant wings.

Ngyahhhhh!

Then it cried out, flapped its wings and flew off into the blue sky.

Resting on Ellis' shoulder, Simorgh looked quite lonely, calling out kooroorooroo.

Part 3

Soon, the palace's female attendants came over and brought Kamito's entourage to the imperial villa some distance away from Scorpio.

The pure-white Serpent Villa was built from marble. It was said that Bahar Kahn, commonly known as the Lecherous King, had built it for four of his concubines.

"Kamito-kun, that is the Lecherous King, the Lecherous King♪ "

"W-What the heck..."

Seeing Fianna especially excited, Kamito did not know how to respond.

"Legend has it that Bahar Kahn imitated the great Demon King Solomon and married many concubines. This Serpent Villa was where they lived."

A female attendant said with a smile.

"The famous King's Bath was also built for King Bahar to bathe with his concubines."

"Fufu, then Kamito-kun should join us later."

"W-What, w-what are you talking about? This pervert, molestor!"

"Th-That is so shameless and immoral!"

Suddenly met with accusations out of the blue, Kamito arrived with his group at a hall with chairs and tables.

"Please wait here, everyone. We will have the rooms prepared immediately."

The female attendants bowed respectfully, then turned around and left.

"...So we are back."

"It felt like a dream."

Rubbing her temples, Rinslet murmured.

...It was only three days earlier when Kamito's team had set off for Ghul-a-val. Inside that Demon King's Capital that had disappeared like a mirage, they had truly experienced way too much.

"Say, Kamito, what happened in the Pyramid?"

Claire asked.

"A long story. I'll explain while we're waiting for Rubia to get here."

"...Okay."

News of their return had already been sent by Ellis via a wind spirit. All they needed to do was wait here and Rubia would arrive shortly.

"The Theocracy's civil war is finally coming to an end, I suppose."

"That would depend on how the princess handles things."

"Despite her youth, the princess looks quite reliable."

"Yes, completely different from her older sister Sjora Kahn."

Hearing Ellis mutter, Claire agreed.

However, Fianna looked a little perplexed.

"Say, uh, about Princess Saladia—"

"What about her?"

"Did anyone feel anything not quite right?"

"...?"

Claire and the rest of the girls looked at each other in puzzlement.

"...Forget it. I must be overthinking."

"Princess Saladia is a user of demon spirits, after all. Perhaps her divine power's ambiance is different from ours."

"Yes, possibly. I must have imagined it..."

Saying that, Fianna waved her hands to dismiss the matter as a mistake.

Part 4

While in the hall waiting for Rubia, Kamito told the girls about what had happened inside the Pyramid.

In the underground space of the Tomb, he had met the Queen of the Demon King City. There, he had witnessed the truth behind the birth of Demon King Solomon a thousand years ago. Then there was Lurie Lizaldia's death, the merchant Safian's true identity, and the revival of Sacred Maiden Areishia within which the Holy Lord's soul dwelled— After listening to all this, Claire said in exasperation.

"...I take my eyes off you for just a bit and you end up getting into so much trouble."

"It's not like I go out of my way to look for trouble."

Kamito retorted indignantly.

"By the way, I never expected that suspicious merchant to be Demon King Solomon..."

"What a surprise."

Ellis and Rinslet both had a shocked look on their faces, murmuring quietly.

In the Academy's courses, Demon King Solomon was described as a tyrant who met had met his demise. That image was far too different from the real person.

"Well, but it seems like he's a different being from the Demon King himself."

Kamito added.

"In comparison, the problem of Sacred Maiden Areishia coming back to life is more serious. Of all things, for Holy Lord Alexandros' soul to be dwelling inside her..."

"...Yeah. Although the Holy Lord's goal is unknown, judging from the Holy Kingdom's current movements, it's clearly nothing good."

The Holy Lord was the true culprit responsible for the Demon King War, having created both the Demon King and the Sacred Maiden. And the Holy Kingdom of Lugia, which served that Elemental Lord, had incited civil war in the Theocracy and secretly controlled Emperor Arneus of Ordesia.

Was his goal to sow chaos throughout the continent?

Perhaps even the Ranbal War had started because of the Holy Kingdom's machinations.

Now that the Holy Lord's soul was revived with the Sacred Maiden's body, what was the Holy Kingdom going to do next?

"Did things happen on your end?"

When Kamito asked—

Claire and Ellis exchanged a glance.

"I suppose..."

With a mixed expression, Claire murmured.

"In a plaza in the city, we encountered the Fire Elemental Lord's avatar."

"Huh?"

"What did you say?" "Are you serious!?"

Not only Kamito but even Fianna and Rinslet were shocked.

"Yes, she was together with the Sacred Spirit Knights. She was the one who destroyed the Pyramid."

"Sure enough, the released Fire Elemental Lord ended up in the Holy Kingdom's hands, huh..."

Previously, Rubia had predicted that the Fire Elemental Lord might have teleported to Alexandria, the capital of the Holy Kingdom. Her guess was evidently correct.

"Don't tell me you made contact with the Fire Elemental Lord?"

"That's right, purely by chance. I don't know why, but we even took her sightseeing around the city."

"...What the heck?"

Kamito could not help but exclaim.

"But she didn't seem like a bad person."

Claire spoke with a mixed expression.

"Didn't the Fire Elemental Lord destroy your homeland?"

"...I know, but she seems to have lost that memory."

"I see now, a similar state as Iseria, huh?"

"Indeed, that's very likely."

At the abandoned city of Megidoa on Ragna Ys, they had encountered Iseria Seaward, the Water Elemental Lord's avatar, who had even forgotten her own identity. Only through the Release Ritual conducted by Fianna did she remember who she was.

"She seemed to remember Nee-sama..."

"Really?"

"Really—"

At that moment, boots were heard outside the hall.

"I am late—"

Saying that, Rubia appeared in her military uniform.

She looked like she had hurried over from Mordis as soon as she received news of Kamito's team's return. Uncharacteristically, her collar was tilted and needed to be fixed up.

"Nee-sama..."

Claire suddenly shut up.

After glancing over everyone gathered, Rubia spoke.

"You have evidently ensured Princess Saladia's safety. Well done."

"Yeah, it was a lot of work..."

Kamito shrugged.

"Any news on the other front?"

"Nothing special. Just that the faction of nobles in Ordesia opposing the emperor seems to be growing with each passing day. At Areishia Spirit Academy, opposition between students and the knights have deepened. I expect news of Princess Saladia's return to affect the Empire greatly too."

"I am quite curious about the nobles' intentions..."

With her chin resting on her hands, Fianna murmured.

"Would you like to hear about what happened at the Demon King City?"

"No, I will listen to the report later."

Rubia shook her head.

"Fianna and I shall pay Princess Saladia a visit first."

"Well, I guess that's definitely more important."

Rubia could be considered the de facto ruler of the rebel army at Mordis. Since the Theocracy's administration was returning to Saladia's rule, naturally, there were matters on that front to discuss.

"I understand. Let us be on our way, Rubia-sama—"

"Yes, the rest of you should take a proper break."

After glancing at Claire, Rubia took Fianna and left the hall.

"Is it really okay for you to not mention the Fire Elemental Lord?"

"Yes, I think it's best not to bring it up yet."

Claire bit her lip hard.

"...I guess you're right."

"I don't know what to do either. In my heart, there's still lingering emotions refusing to forgive the Fire Elemental Lord for destroying my homeland..."

She recalled that very day when the torrential rain of fire had deprived her of

her homeland.

In her sister's heart, surely the flames of that day continued to burn still.

But—

"I really want to see her again. And chat with her..."

Claire murmured intermittently.

"...I need to think. What to do from now on."

Kamito crossed his arms and looked up at the ceiling of the hall.

The Holy Lord sealed inside Sacred Maiden Areishia had revived.

The Ordesia Empire was plunged into deeper chaos, sowing seeds of internal strife.

"...Looks like we need to investigate more into the Holy Lord."

"Yeah. Let's check out the Theocracy's library later."

"However, I feel that the Divine Ritual Institute's literature is not going to offer much."

"True, but there might be clues."

"Ah—"

At that moment, Claire cried out.

"But we happen to have a source that we can ask about the Elemental Lords!"

"Where?"

Claire pointed to Rinslet and said:

"Iseria Seaward, the Water Elemental Lord."

Chapter 4 - The Princess Maiden of Water

Part 1

"I-I knew it, this is too embarrassing. Can I not wear the Academy's uniform instead?"

Facing Rinslet, who was awkwardly rubbing her knees together with a bright-red countenance— "No. Although the Academy's uniform can serve as crude ritual attire, you must wear ancient traditional garb for summoning an Elemental Lord."

Claire spoke seriously.

They were at a small shrine in the city of Zohar that princess maidens used to commune with spirits.

Inside the Theocracy where worship of the Demon King ran deep, there were very few shrines dedicated to the Five Great Elemental Lords. Even in high-class venues such as the palace, there would only be a shrine for worshiping the Earth Elemental Lord at most.

That being said, the city was not completely devoid of such shrines. Hence, after obtaining permission from Princess Saladia, Kamito's team borrowed a small shrine used for worshiping the Five Great Elemental Lords.

"...Ooh~, the last time I wore Raiment of Water was in my childhood."

Dressed in a sheer garment that provided tantalizing glimpses to her skin, Rinslet helplessly hung her head.

She had conducted the Winter Serenity Ritual in Laurenfrost when she was

younger, but ever since her little sister Judia was sealed in ice, she practically never wore this outfit again.

The Raiment of Water was supreme ritual attire worn by princess maidens serving the Water Elemental Lord. Compared to the ritual attire of fire, which Fianna, Rubia and even Ren Ashbell had worn, this outfit stood out as far more revealing, with a design that especially emphasized the body's curves.

A translucent veil covered the noble young lady's snow-white skin. A skirt with a bold high slit, running past her lovely navel, was wrapped around the graceful curves of her hips.

Every time Rinslet twisted her body in embarrassment, her pale thighs came into view, making Kamito unsure where to look.

Even though it was the Divine Ritual Institute's designated formal ritual attire that even the Water Queen would also wear, it proved to be especially seductive when worn by the pure and innocent Rinslet.

"K-Kamito-san! It is far too embarrassing when you keep staring like that..."

Rinslet's slightly teary eyes were glaring at Kamito resentfully.

Involuntarily mesmerized, Kamito hastily turned his gaze away.

"S-Sorry...! I couldn't help it because you're too pretty..."

"...Ooh, my goodness, w-w-what are you talking about!?"

Rinslet huddled into a ball while steam rose from her head.

On the altar for worshiping the Elemental Lord was a large jar of water.

Kamito had heard that it was for the Elemental Lord to bestow her voice upon the human realm, using water as the medium.

"Will the offering dance be fine?"

Claire asked.

"Of course. I started presiding over the ritual since I was young."

Saying that, Rinslet walked up to the altar.

The bells attached to her ankles sounded.

"—O flowing water, the source of all life. One who embraces the earth gently, grant thy blessings to the earth—"

The bells kept ringing—

Clad in the Raiment of Water, Rinslet began to dance in front of the jar of water. In the darkness, her platinum blonde long hair glowed with beautiful radiance. Her graceful fingers were mesmerizing.

A flowing dance, no less spectacular than those performed by princes maidens of the Divine Ritual Institute.

"Raindrops of tender affection, wind and snow of wrath, O great lord of water ruling over all—"

The Ice Rose seal on the back of Rinslet's left hand glowed with dazzling light.

This was the seal that Iseria Seaward had bestowed upon her at the abandoned city on Ragna Ys.

Even though it was not a formal spirit contract's seal, Rinslet was able to establish a connection to her through this seal.

"—I implore thee to listen to the voice of your princess maiden!"

The light surging from the ice rose painted the surroundings white— "—What is the matter, Rinslet?"

Suddenly, a voice was heard from *the mouth of Fenrir*, who was crouching in a corner of the shrine.

"W-What!?"

Kamito could not help but exclaim in surprise.

"Over there!?"

Hearing the voice, Rinslet could not help but cry out in the middle of her dance offering.

Unconcerned with the speechless Kamito and company—

Fenrir slowly stood up and walked unsteadily up to Rinslet.

"Compared to that water mirror, possessing your contracted spirit is easier,

right?"

"R-Really?"

"Yes. I previously used this dog spirit's mouth to speak, right?"

Indeed, last time, Kamito had received a clue to Restia's whereabouts from Iseria speaking through Fenrir. To think that the specially prepared jar of water turned out to be a waste of effort.

"Rinslet, why did you call for me?"

"Y-Yes, we would like to inquire something of you, Iseria-sama."

Kneeling on the ground, Rinslet bowed her head before Fenrir.

Claire and the others hastily did the same.

...It was quite a ridiculous scene from a bystander's point of view.

"Dispense with the formalities. I am nothing more than the Water Elemental Lord's avatar."

"No, absolutely not."

Rinslet slowly shook her head.

"...Fine. Then what do you wish to inquire of me?"

"About the great Holy Lord Alexandros, leader of the Elemental Lords—"

Rinslet told Iseria, who was in the form of a white wolf, about what had happened in the Demon King City.

"...How unbelievable, never did I expect Alexandros to revive in the human realm."

Moments later—

After listening to the whole story, Iseria entered a pensive pose with Fenrir's jaw propped against his front paw.

Since she looked like Fenrir, it looked quite hilarious— "Iseria-sama, may I ask what do you know about the Holy Lord?"

Fenrir shook his head at the question.

"...My apologies. I have almost no memories from my time as an Elemental Lord. It was only with your help that I finally recovered a portion of my memories and power."

"Well, figures..."

"H-Hey, mind your manners!"

Hearing Claire's quite murmur, Ellis scolded.

"As the ruler of wisdom and power, Alexandros is the leader of us Elemental Lords. However, at the very end of that Spirit War, he was corrupted by the Otherworldly Darkness summoned by Darkness Elemental Lord Ren Ashdoll. Like us—"

"I heard that the Holy Lord tempted the hero Solomon and created the opportunity for the Demon King's creation. Why exactly did he do that?"

Kamito asked a question at this point.

"This is my first time hearing of the Holy Lord interfering in the human realm. However, it is decidedly odd. We Elemental Lords bestowed power on the Sacred Queen precisely for the sake of quelling the chaos brought by the Demon King."

"I knew it, there must be some kind of secret in the Sacred Maiden..."

Crossing his arms, Kamito muttered.

What was Alexandros going to do after obtaining Sacred Maiden Areishia's physical body?

Also, Lurie had mentioned resetting the world, what exactly— "Do you know anything about the Fire Elemental Lord?"

This time, it was Claire's turn to ask.

Probably because Iseria was using Fenrir's appearance, Claire did not muster any respect at all. Kamito could hardly blame her after seeing Fenrir shake while scratching an ear with his hind leg— "...Well, from what I have heard, although I cannot be certain, it is possible that Volcanicus is bound by some kind of covenant with the Holy Lord."

"Covenant?"

"Yes. On the brink of the Spirit War, the Elemental Lords entered into an inviolable covenant with one another. For the sake of building a solid alliance to oppose Ren Ashdoll."

"So that's why she couldn't come with us..."

Claire whispered regretfully.

"Has anything strange happened on your end?"

"Hmm, it has been ordinary as ever—Oh."

"...What is the matter?"

"Well, speaking of strange, there is one matter I am slightly concerned about."

Iseria spoke in a serious tone of voice.

"What is it?"

"Gates to Astral Zero have apparently opened in the human realm."

"...? Does that not happen all the time?"

In places like the Spirit Forest, powerful spirits would occasionally pass through naturally occurring gates to invade the human realm. Taking out such spirits was also part of the Syphid Knights' job.

"The quantity is a bit too great. Even though investigations are ongoing, it is certain that some kind of situation has arisen in Astral Zero."

"...I see."

Such a phenomenon was definitely worrying. However, it did not seem related to the problems Kamito and company were currently facing.

"This is the extent of what I know. I apologize for not being of much help."

"You are too humble, Iseria-sama."

Rinslet shook her head frantically.

"Goodbye. I look forward to your pancakes next time you happen to pass through Astral Zero."

The glow in Fenrir's eyes vanished, turning them back into his original round eyes.

"...To be honest, that wasn't very useful."

"C-Claire! You are talking about an Elemental Lord, you know!?"

"I went as far as to wear this outfit!"

Hearing Claire's comment, Ellis got angry and Rinslet grumbled.

"Well, it can't be helped that she lost her memory. Next, we should do more research on the Holy Lord."

"...Yeah."

Claire stood up.

"Let's return to the palace. Princess Saladia said she had a celebration prepared."

"I-I shall change back into my uniform first."

"You're going to take off this pretty outfit? That's a shame."

"K-Kamito-san!"

Part 2

"I, Saladia Kahn, daughter of Rajihal Kahn, express my gratitude for your assistance on this occasion. I hereby swear to an alliance with Legitimate Ordesia."

"Much obliged, Princess Saladia—"

At the throne room in Scorpia, Fianna and Princess Saladia shook hands.

Saladia had completed her coronation ceremony, albeit a simple one. The many retainers serving Sjora Kahn had been arrested and imprisoned by the army under her command.

For Legitimate Ordesia, this was yet another powerful ally they had gained after Dracunia.

Although they could not expect much in terms of military support, the fact that they had gained a new allied nation would definitely help in securing support from the Ordesia nobles.

"I have prepared a small celebration banquet to deepen the friendship between our nations. Please honor me with your attendance."

"Thank you for your hospitality, Princess Saladia—"

Fianna bowed gracefully then took her leave with Rubia, leaving the throne room.

When they walked out of the palace, the sun was already setting. A crowd of small spirits had started gathering in the courtyard. They must have noticed that humans were holding a celebration banquet.

"With this, we have recruited two allied nations at least."

"Yes, people in the Empire are sure to make a move after receiving reports of this."

"The nobles will rebel?"

"No, that would be too soon—"

Just then, Rubia suddenly stopped walking and looked around the courtyard.

"Rubia-sama?"

"Fianna, do you sense it?"

Rubia asked quietly.

"...Huh?"

"I am referring to Princess Saladia. At close range, did you sense anything?"

Fianna widened her dusk-colored eyes.

"Now that you mention it, you noticed too, Rubia-sama?"

"Indeed. Something ominous evidently lurks within Princess Saladia."

"...Yes."

Fianna nodded.

Had it been anyone other than a Queen candidate and a former Queen, they might not have noticed that faint evil presence.

"Something seems to have possessed the princess."

"I fear it is the same entity that had possessed Sjora Kahn."

Rubia said.

"During the final round of the Blade Dance, that witch's personality clearly changed. I suspect this time, it has abandoned Sjora Kahn's body and possessed Princess Saladia instead."

"Something like that is possible?"

"Generations of the Demon King Cult have passed down ancient curses unknown to the Divine Ritual Institute. I expect they include magic of this sort."

Rubia turned her head back towards Scorpia and said slowly.

"—Tonight we hunt. Get ready."

Part 3

The sacred capital Alexandros of the Holy Kingdom of Lugia was situated at the foot of the holy mountain of Rondinia, the birthplace of Areishia Idriss, the legendary Sacred Queen.

It was a mountain city surrounded by walls of pure white. As the capital of one of the three great nations of the continent alongside Ordesia and Quina, the city's size was surprisingly small with an extremely small population.

The entire city had evolved into a gigantic shrine dedicated to worshiping the Holy Lord, because the city's core functions of politics and commerce had moved over to the secondary capital of Meria roughly two hundred years earlier.

This was a city where scholarly pursuits and worshiping rites were directed by princess maidens.

At the very center of the sacred capital of Alexandria...

In the grand cathedral known as the Ivory Tower— A girl in pure-white vestments entered.

It was an empty place.

The worshiped king's was clearly no longer present.

The girl stood on a map of the continent carved on the floor.

"—*Est*, you are here, yes?"

Suddenly, she called out to empty space.

Particles of light appeared, followed by a cardinal dressed in vestments of pure white.

"—How may I serve you, Holy Lord?"

The girl addressed as "Est"—

Was precisely the Holy Kingdom's cardinal, Millennia Sanctus.

Reflected in her clear eyes of violet was the face of Areishia Idriss.

Areishia's expression relaxed a little.

"—Well done, Est. You succeeded in liberating my vessel."

Millennia bowed her head.

"However, your faithful apostle, Lurie Lizaldia, has perished."

"Yes, indeed. A sad fact perhaps."

Areishia shook her head calmly.

"Nevertheless, her long-cherished wish shall come into fruition. Just like yours."

The Sacred Maiden looked up at the cathedral's painted ceiling and spoke in a voice filled with sorrow.

The painting depicted the likeness of the Holy Lord meting out punishment to Darkness Elemental Lord Ren Ashdoll.

It was a primordial fresco named Final Judgment.

"Time is ripe. The Sacred Maiden vessel has awakened. Time to put the plan into action, Est. We must rectify the world that the Darkness Elemental Lord's sins has set on a path towards destruction."

"Everything is ready, my lord. I await your command."

"Has the candidate location been selected?"

"Yes, how about here—?"

Millennia nodded and tapped the tip of her staff against the map on the floor.

Chapter 5 - Celebration

Part 1

—After sundown.

A roaring bonfire was lit in the middle of Scorpia's grand plaza to start the princess' coronation celebration.

The plaza's floor was covered with carpet embroidered with exquisite patterns, a local specialty of the Alphas Theocracy. Served in utensils of silver and gold, cooked dishes and fruit were brought to the venue one after another together with pitchers of wine.

Having bathed, Claire and company were sitting on the carpet, looking at the luxurious feast set before their eyes.

"Having a meal sitting on the ground is quite a new experience."

Claire, her skin smooth and tender after soaking in the bath, tossed her hair while she spoke.

"I heard that this is a traditional banquet custom in the Theocracy."

"I'm actually more used to this."

Thinking back to his Instructional School days, Kamito remarked.

Because the Instructional School originated from the Theocracy's Demon King Cult, Kamito was more familiar with desert culture than the noble young ladies of Ordesia were.

"This carpet is amazing. I wonder how they embroidered it?"

Very interested, Ellis murmured.

Kamito could smell floral fragrance from her neck, probably because she used specially made rose soap.

"This is the work of princess maidens specializing in weaving, guided by spirits. As a result, authentic Alphas textiles contain blessings from spirits."

The knowledgeable Claire raised an index finger and explained.

"...I see. No wonder it feels so comfortable to sit on."

Hearing that, Kamito commented with admiration while sitting between Claire and Ellis.

Apart from Kamito's team, invited guests included the general of the royal guard, leaders of local militias and the courtiers imprisoned by Sjora Kahn.

Practically all of the retainers who had greedily accepted the privileges and authority granted by Sjora were now thrown into prison. They were not executed because Princess Saladia wanted to show she had no intent to continue her sister's reign of terror.

As for Saladia herself, she was currently sitting on the new throne, listening to her retainers' reports.

Her sitting there, dignified and awe-inspiring, it was hard to imagine her as a girl the same age as Kamito and his companions.

"Princess Saladia has a tough job ahead of her."

"Yes, there are still quite a few local warlords coveting succession to the Kahn dynasty."

When Claire stared at the princess and made a comment, Ellis concurred.

Just then—

"Apologies for my tardiness."

Kamito and company heard Fianna's voice from behind.

"Seriously, where did you go?"

"Hmm, something came up, yes..."

Replying quietly, Fianna then sat down gracefully next to Ellis.

"Ellis, I have personally written a letter to Dracunia, could you deliver it to the Lord Dragon King?"

"Affirmative. I will command the fastest wind spirit to send it."

Ellis recited an incantation and summon a wind spirit in the form of a falcon.

At first glance, the spirit looked quite similar to Simorgh except smaller. The falcon took the letter in its beak then flew out of the palace like a gust of wind.

Due to their status as the second princess and a duke's daughter, Fianna and Ellis used to be a bit too formal with each other, but ever since Ellis started working as Fianna's secretary, they had gotten much closer.

"If Dracunia enters a formal alliance with us, I expect Arneus to balk at reckless action."

"Yes, with uncertainty in the Empire's internal situation, he would think twice before angering one of the top military powers in the continent—"

While Claire and the girls were conversing, the palace's sumptuous food was brought out dish by dish.

There was oven-baked barley bread, flat wheat bread, whole-roasted pig, a dish where a whole chicken was stuffed with stuffing, sandfish fried with herbs, deep-fried red scorpions flavored with salt, lamb stewed with fragrant vegetables, meat paired with fruit sauce, grapes on a vine served on silverware, dessert made from roasted apple topped with honey...

"Wow... Everything looks so delicious!"

"There are dishes I have never seen before!"

Claire's gaze was firmly fixated upon a dessert filled with peaches.

After the food was served, a musical ensemble composed of princess maidens made their debut at the center of the plaza and started to play exotic sounding music.

Attracted by the music and the luxurious feast, spirits kept drifting over. This area seemed to be particularly amenable to earth spirits. Many lizard spirits

with hard scales and scorpion spirits with hammer-like tails could be found in the surroundings.

Team Scarlet's contracted spirits were freely roaming the plaza.

This was a scene quite rare to see during the gatherings of Ordesian nobles.

The retainers began to chat happily with wine glasses in their hands. Some of them even poked skewers of meat into Scarlet's tail to roast while she was strolling in the plaza.

"Claire, is that really okay? To do that to a high-tier spirit?"

Seeing that, Kamito turned to Claire beside him and asked.

"Sure, Scarlet is just going around, asking to be fed anyway..."

"Like candle service huh?"

"Well I suppose."

"I would beg to differ..."

Ellis quipped quietly.

"Hmph, we must not allow ourselves to be outdone, Fenrir!"

With a toss of her long platinum blonde hair, Rinslet stood up.

Accompanied by a blizzard, the summoned Fenrir froze peaches and grapes that were served on platters, producing instant sherbet.

"Hmm, well played..."

"Claire, let us have a contest. See whose spirit will become the most popular at this banquet!"

"Bring it on!"

"Why do you need to have a contest?"

Seeing the two members of Raven Class clash with sparks flying, Kamito sighed.

"Well, this isn't so bad. It's not every day we get to have a banquet."

Fianna shrugged in response.

"Speaking of which, Georgios rarely gets summoned to banquets like this."

"After all, as a royal heirloom spirit, he must not be displayed too casually."

"Does he eat human food like Scarlet and the others?"

Spirits have no need to eat for the most part, but most of them would happily eat food when offered.

"Hmm, he seems to prefer iron to food. Georgios often sucks in objects like useless broken swords and the like."

"I-I see... That's not too surprising."

Saying that, Kamito raised his gaze a little.

He could see a sacred bird with rainbow tail flying overhead.

The princess' retainers put their hands together and paid respects to the bird.

"It feels like they're worshiping Simorgh..."

"Yes, it has struck me as incredible since just now."

Ellis was equally puzzled.

"The Theocracy apparently worships bird-shaped spirits. I think it is because a giant bird carried the Demon King to battle according to legend—"

Just as Fianna started to explain...

"Onii-sama~!"

"Uwah... Uh—"

A petite figure silently approached and hugged Kamito.

"Muir!?"

"Ehehe..."

He turned his neck—

Only to see Muir smiling shyly behind him.

Instead of her usual Instructional School combat outfit, she was wearing a desert nation dress. Her ash-gray hair was tied on opposite sides of her head, bouncing energetically.

"Muir, you've recovered."

"Yes, I'm fine now, Onii-sama♪"

Saying that, Muir nodded energetically.

In an earlier reconnaissance mission at Zohar, she and Lily were unfortunately absorbed by the strategic-class spirit Leviathan. Consequently, they had been bedridden while Kamito's team went off to Ghul-a-val.

"Has Lily recovered too?"

"She can walk now, but she didn't want to come here."

"I see. That's quite like her."

Kamito smiled wryly. Lily was a member of the Elfim race and hated human crowds.

"Onii-sama, let me feed you."

"...Woah!?"

Muir jumped and sat down on Kamito's lap.

"W-Wait a sec, what are you doing!?"

Seeing that, Claire glared at her.

"Hmph, Onii-sama is the personal seat of Muir, the little sister."

"Y-You're no little sister!"

"Right, sworn sister. A sworn sister can be married, so status is even higher than a real sister."

"...! M-Married...!"

Claire's face instantly flushed bright red.

Just then, the Demon Slayer at Kamito's side suddenly glowed.

"Back off for that is my position—"

"E-Est!?"

...For some reason, even Est joined in.

"No, this is Muir's spot."

"..."

Est still had no expression on her face, but she defiantly tried to squeeze onto Kamito's lap.

Her silver-white hair was glowing faintly.

...She seemed a little angry.

"H-Hey, you two...!"

"K-Kamito, this is shameful public behavior!"

"Forcing two girls to serve you, you seem to be enjoying this!"

"...~T-Turn into charcoal, charcoal!"

"Woah, hold on, Claire!?"

"—What a ruckus."

Suddenly, the girl with jet-black wings floated down in front of Kamito's group.



Chuckling, Restia smiled mischievously.

"Hmm, you're here, darkness spirit..."

In response, Muir glared at her warily.

"I am not petty enough to say anything like keeping Kamito all to myself."

Restia declared with an expression of full confidence.

"Are you serious?"

"Why don't we all just share Kamito?"

"Share?"

Getting a bad feeling, Kamito asked.

"Yes, we will carve out time when we can monopolize Kamito. I shall take Kamito during the night, while you two can share him for the daytime."

"Bullshit!"

Kamito hastily protested against Restia's suggestion.

"Although manifesting in the daytime is not a problem for a high-tier spirit like me, darkness spirits do find nighttime more comfortable after all♪"

"All at your convenience, huh!?"

"No way I'm agreeing to that. You get Onii-sama all to yourself at night!"

"Darkness spirit, I knew it, we must settle the question of superiority between us—"

This time, Muir and Est started to join forces.

"All of you are getting along so well."

Watching them, Fianna sighed and murmured.

The musicians played a wonderful melody and the princess maidens began to dance.

Princess maidens in the service of spirits were usually beautiful maidens and this time was no exception. However, since Kamito has been in the company of top beauties from the Empire all along, he was more focused on rare desert

delicacies than on dancing.

"Est, what do you want? I'll get it for you."

"Yes. I want that rotating meat."

Hearing his offer, Est pointed to a skewered chunk of meat, rotating while being roasted.

"Miss Sword Spirit, that is the kebab."

"Kebab?"

"Slices of lamb are roasted against a charcoal flame while it spins."

"Then you roll it up in vegetables and eat it with a sweet and spicy sauce."

"Kamito, I want kebab."

Est was already holding her fork, her violet eyes shining bright.

Kamito sliced some meat off from the skewer. Then he noticed something weird with Claire's behavior.

"...Claire, what are you doing?"

"Hyah!"

When he called to her, Claire's entire person jumped.

The jump caused several peaches to roll out from under her uniform.

"...This is quite unseemly for a guest at a state banquet. And you used to be a duke's daughter too."

"I-I'm just planning to eat them in my room!"

Claire shook her twintails vigorously and started to pick up the fallen peaches.

"Seriously, what are you doing...?"

Ellis remarked in exasperation.

"Ellis, pardon my late arrival."

"My esteemed sister—"

Just then, Velsaria took a seat next to Ellis, holding a pitcher of wine.

Apparently, she had been finishing a tune-up of her fortress spirit at Vivian Melosa.

"Ellis, would you like a drink?"

"Yes, please, my esteemed sister."

Ellis nodded and raised her cup.

"I heard you fought with that Luminaris inside the Demon King City."

"Yes, she lives up to her reputation as a formidable enemy."

"Nevertheless, you fought on equal terms, did you not?"

"I am honored that I had a chance to meet Luminaris-dono in combat. Even though she is a knight of the Holy Kingdom, her sword is pure and honest."

"Is that so? A valuable experience, I see."

"Yes, my esteemed sister—"

Ellis smiled. Velsaria smiled gently too.

...Their sisterly relationship, which used to be quite stiff, had become much more harmonious.

Seeing that, Claire looked sad for an instant.

"Nee-sama isn't here yet..."

"I guess Rubia doesn't like banquets much."

"Totally wrong. Back in the day, Nee-sama used to be very happy whenever festivals and celebrations came up."

The two twintails were drooping in disappointment.

"Nee-sama was so good at playing Old Maid."

"Really..."

Seeing Claire like that...

"Rubia-sama will be here soon. She is getting ready right now."

Fianna explained.

"Ready? Ready for what?"

"You shall know soon."

Saying that, Fianna kept her gaze on Princess Saladia on the throne.

Even though it was a banquet situation, Fianna seemed oddly nervous.

—Suddenly.

The flute stopped and the throne room went silent.

Everyone's gaze gathered at the entrance to the plaza.

Appearing there was&mash;

"Nee-sama...!?"

Sitting next to Kamito, Claire exclaimed softly.

Indeed, it was Rubia Elstein.

However, instead of her usual military uniform, she was dressed in a princess maiden's ritual attire.

Whispering could be heard from the guests.

"Rubia-dono, what is this outfit for?"

Princess Saladia asked in surprise.

Rubia slowly walked up to the throne and bowed magnanimously.

"To celebrate your ascension, Princess Saladia, I would like to offer a ritual dance."

"You will be one to perform the ritual dance?"

Saladia frowned and asked.

Indeed, this was a natural reaction for anyone who did not know that Rubia Elstein used to be the Queen serving the Fire Elemental Lord.

"Princess Saladia, Rubia-dono is a princess maiden of the Divine Ritual Institute. I am certain she would be able to please the spirits here."

Fianna stood up and offered support.

"I see now. In that case, I look forward to your performance."

The princess nodded and raised her hand lightly. The sound of flute music

resumed.

They played music for pleasing spirits.

With a flutter of her crimson hair that looked as though it were burning, Rubia began to dance gracefully.

"Nee-sama..."

Claire widened her ruby-like eyes. It was many years ago since she last watched her sister dancing from up close. The last time was the Great Festival of Spirits at the imperial capital.

With unblinking eyes, Claire stared at her older sister's flame-like dancing figure.

Small flames were produced from her fans, spinning back and forth in Rubia's surroundings.

The spirits gathered at the banquet expressed their joy by flashing nonstop.

Frolicking in the flames, Rubia was so beautiful that Kamito was mesmerized.

"I don't know anything about dancing, but it's really pretty..."

"Yes. This is Nee-sama's dance, Kamito."

Claire spoke with pride.

In the past, Kamito had witnessed Rubia offering a ritual dance performance at the imperial capital.

But back then, he was completely focused on the Instructional School's mission had no leisure to pay attention to that beauty of hers.

Rubia's dance heated up like a blazing fire as the music rose in intensity.



At that very moment, Kamito suddenly noticed it.

Sitting on the throne, there seemed to be something wrong with Princess Saladia.

(...What's going on?)

"...Ah...Ah..."

She began to moan as though having a seizure.

"Saladia-sama, is something bothering you?"

The retainers noticed the anomaly and began to clamor.

"Princess, are you alright?"

Rinslet stood up with worry.

However, just as she was about to hurry over, Fianna stopped her.

"Wait, Rinslet."

"Your Highness? What is it—"

"Please be quiet, everyone!"

Fianna stood up and shouted.

Instantly, the throne room became silent.

"Ah, guh, oh, ohhh, ohhhhhhhhhh—"

Clutching her chest in pain, Saladia collapsed on the ground.

That hoarse voice of old men did not belong to Saladia.

Sounding like many ghosts, the sound was quite terrifying.

(This voice is—!)

Kamito jumped in surprise. He remembered that voice.

It was precisely the bizarre noise made by Sjora Kahn just before she died.

"Curses, how dare you conspire against us, damn giiiiirl—"

Like pitch-black mist, dark miasma surged out from the collapsed princess.

The retainers in the surroundings lost consciousness one after another as

soon as the thick miasma touched them.

"How is the pain? Hierarchs of the Demon King Cult—"

Coldly looking at the dark miasma, Rubia spoke.

"I first realized your true identity when I was investigating the grimoire about forbidden spells that Sjora Kahn had left behind. A particular type of magic intrigued me."

"...Guh... Urgh. Damn yooooooooou...!"

"*Reincarnation magic*. Abandoning the physical body then using one's mind to possess another person—"

"Damn you damn you damn you daaaaaaamn...!"

The terrifying dark miasma surged out and crawled along the floor, trying to escape.

However, its surroundings were already surrounded by a barrier of light.

"An isolation barrier. Escaping is impossible."

Holding Save the Queen by the time Kamito noticed, Fianna spoke sternly.

"What Rubia-sama had performed was the first style of ritual dance—Exorcism Dance. The goal was to force out the evil occupying Saladia's body."

"D-Damn girl, unforgivable, unforgivable!"

The dark miasma crashed around inside the isolation barrier, but only got burned by the barrier of light.

"The fearsome grudge of the Hierarchs, you shall be destroyed here and now!"

Countless blue-white flames lit up at the tip of Rubia's raised fan.

"That flame is..."

Surprised, Claire exclaimed.

Indeed, these flames were not from spirit magic.

Instead, it was the special ability passed down generations of the Elstein family. Even capable of freezing flames— "—Absolute Flame."

The anomalous flame swallowed the Hierarchs' vengeful souls together with the barrier of light.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Gradually incinerated, the dark miasma screamed, struggling in pain.

Having secretly manipulated the Kahn dynasty from the shadows for hundreds of years, the Hierarchs— Were easily destroyed here and now.

"Saladia-sama, are you alright!?"

The retainers hurried over to the collapsed Saladia's side.

"Please rest assured. She has only fainted."

After Fianna chanted spirit magic for awakening someone, she soon opened her eyes.

"...mm, ooh... oohhh..."

"Are you feeling alright, Princess Saladia?"

Saladia blinked in puzzlement.

"Uh, what happened? What did, I..."

"The darkness occupying you has been destroyed."

Rubia stepped forward and explained everything to her.

After hearing that, Saladia closed her eyes—

"Evil was lurking inside me just as it had with my sister Sjora, right?"

Surprisingly, she calm accepted it as fact.

"On further thought, there were warning signs. Sjora's change and how I unbelievably decided to head into Ghul-a-val for the sake of the Demon King's Coffin were both due to that darkness, I suppose."

"Successive Hierarchs of the Demon King Cult have used the forbidden spell of reincarnation to lurk within the royal family's bloodline to rule the Alphas Theocracy. However, that history finally drew to a close today."

"Much appreciated, Rubia-dono. And you too, Princess Fianna—"

Saladia bowed deeply. Immediately, the retainers clapped naturally.

"—Very well, resume the banquet. Music to please the spirits will be performed next."

Saladia clapped her hands.

Joyous melodies once again resounded throughout the palace.

Part 2

Late at night—

Kamito quietly slipped out of the banquet venue and returned to his room in the imperial villa.

According to the Theocracy's customs, the celebration would continue all the way until morning, but he was too tired to persist.

After all, the Demon King City's collapse was less than a day ago.

Claire and the girls also left the banquet halfway and returned.

After putting Est and Restia, who had turned into sword form after eating to their hearts' content, against the wall, Kamito laid himself down on the bed.

The large round bed featured a decorated canopy. This could very well be a bed that the Lecherous King had used in the past.

(...Now that I think about it, I really get mixed feelings.) Spreading his arms out, he looked up overhead.

...Although he was far from being drunk, there was a small amount of alcohol from the wine remaining in his body.

"I never thought Velsaria would be so aggressive in forcing others to drink with her..."

...Now that he thought back, she must have been intoxicated back then.

His body still felt hot. It was hard to fall asleep.

Although the mission in the Theocracy was considered done, there was still so much to think about.

(The resurrected Sacred Maiden Areishia... And Alexandros, huh—) The true culprit who had created Demon King Solomon a thousand years ago.

The most worshiped Elemental Lord on the continent, why did he do something like that?

(Lurie Lizaldia mentioned rebuilding the world...) Also, the army of *angels* that Kamito had seen was coming to the human realm— ...What did that mean?

While he was staring at the bed canopy, lost in deep thought— "Kamito—"

He felt something squirming under his sheets.

"Est?"

Kamito jumped in surprise and sat up.

He found Est sitting quietly on the bed, naked except for kneesocks.

"...Didn't you change back to sword form?"

"Seeing as you cannot sleep, I shall serve as your pillow, Kamito."

"P-Pillow...?"

"Yes."

Nodding lightly, Est leaned her naked body against him.

"...!?"

Kamito almost cried out.

...By pillow, she meant a body pillow, huh?

(She's cool to the touch, which feels really great, but...!) With an elemental affinity of steel, Est's body temperature was quite low.

His body felt boiling hot due to the alcohol, so Est's cool sensation was perfect.

"...Wait, stop, put on your clothes first!"

"Pillows do not wear clothes."

"...!"

Est tilted her head slightly, staring straight at him with her clear violet eyes. She was usually very obedient but today, she was oddly stubborn.

...Just then, Kamito noticed.

Est's cheeks were mildly flushed.

"Don't tell me you were drinking?"

"Offerings must not be declined."

Est spoke expressionlessly.

...So that was what had happened. Evidently, she had gotten intoxicated from the alcohol in the divine wine prepared for spirits.

"Hua... I am a sword spirit. I do not get drunk."

"Drunk people always say that..."

Shrugging helplessly, Kamito gave up trying to persuade Est.

He went with the flow and lay back down on the bed. Suddenly thinking of something, he asked.

"Say, Est—Did you dream about her again?"

By "her," he was referring to Sacred Maiden Areishia.

On the way to the Demon King City, Est had dreamed about her again.

"No more dreams since last time."

Est shook her head.

"I see."

"What is the matter, Kamito?"

"Nothing much—"

Kamito quietly dropped the matter. He originally thought that the revival of Sacred Maiden Areishia, Est's original contractor, would have unsettled Est.

(No, I guess I'm the one who's unsettled instead...) Kamito laughed at himself in his thoughts.

"Kamito—"

"Hmm?"

"I will forever be your sword, Kamito."

"Yeah, that's right—"

Kamito gently stroked Est's shining silver-white hair.

Just then—

"Hold it right there, I will have you know that I am Kamito's first sword—"

"...!?"

Jet-black feathers floated lightly onto the bed.

In the next second, Restia in her dress pounced on Kamito.

Her soft bosom, like bountiful fruit, pressed against the tip of his nose.

"Restia, are you drunk too!?"

"I am upholding my right of possession."

Restia wrapped her arm around Kamito's waist as though competing with Est.

"Darkness spirit, you are in the way. Leave."

"Oh dear, aren't you the one who ought to leave?"

"H-Hey, you two... Uwah!"

Click.

In that instant, there was the sound of something hard getting pushed.

A mechanism hidden by the pillow had apparently been triggered.

Then there was a sound like gears turning— The great bed started to rotate.

"What?"

A bizarre tune began to play from a music box while pink spirit lights illuminated the entire room.

...Speaking of which, this imperial villa belonged to the legendary Lecherous King.

It would come as no surprise if this room had been used by royals to keep mistresses.

"W-What is this, it started spinning!!"

"Hua, Kamito, my eyes are dizzy."

Kamito was rotating, hugged on the bed by two spirits.

"Is this the spirit kebab?"

With eyes spinning, Kamito this stupid thought crossed his mind.

Part 3

—While the celebration was taking place in the Theocracy...

A certain incident shook the imperial capital at Ordesia.

"...Did you say rebellion!?"

Woken from his sleep, Emperor Arneus roared angrily at his retainers.

The incident had happened several hours earlier.

After Arneus' ascension to the throne, at the Academy town which was under the Imperial Knights' control, the students and some of the teachers led an uprising.

Even though the principal cause of the rebellion was still under investigation, it was evident that the Imperial Knights' oppressive occupation of the Academy, whose cherished ideals included freedom and independent thinking, had elicited even more resistance.

In isolation, that would not have been too bad. After all, it was nothing rare for students to organize radical protests, and quelling them would be easy just by mobilizing the Imperial Knights' occupation force garrisoned in the Academy town.

However, the timing was terrible this time.

After his ascension, Arneus' policies had incurred dissatisfaction from the noble. Brutal oppression of nobles belonging to the anti-Arneus faction also caused resentment in the populace.

Reportedly, even the neutral nobles with seats in the imperial council had abandoned Arneus, secretly and frequently exchanging correspondence with the exiled second princess Fianna.

Under such circumstances, to think even a rebellion started.

This was like dropping a lighted match into a powder keg.

Left alone, all negative feeling against the Empire would explode all at once.

"Supporting the rebellion at the Academy town, Marquess Boderalume, all the houses of Haldery, and Earl Edelgart have mobilized their forces."

In charge of military matters, Duke Cygnus Fahrengart calmly reported.

"Even though it is not yet confirmed, there are rumors of movements in Margrave Laurenfrost's territories too—"

"Damn it, why!? Why won't they obey my orders, the emperor's orders!?"

Emperor Arneus anxiously threw a cup.

He had gone as far as to take the imperial throne with the Holy Kingdom's aid...

But the only ones who recognized him as emperor were the sycophantic retainers.

"Quell the rebellion at once! I allow the use of militarized spirits—"

"Using militarized spirits against students? The nobles will feel strongly against that."

Duke Fahrengart spoke calmly.

"I don't care. They need to be taught a lesson. I need people to know the consequences of defying me."

"Deployment of militarized spirits against the Academy requires authorization from the imperial council."

"...Shut up! These are emperor's orders!"

Arneus slammed the conference room table, instantly plunging his retainers into silence.

However, Duke Fahrengart remained completely unfazed, not even raising an eyebrow.

"The rebellion at the Academy town can be suppressed using the garrison force. However, nobles engaged in armed rebellion must be punished. A

military force will be assembled immediately."

After speaking without any emotion, Duke Fahrengart excused himself.

"Damn it, why... why...!?"

After sending the retainers away, inside the military conference room—
Arneus began to drink sullenly alone.

Eliminating the emperor, framing his younger sister with the crime of attempted assassination, everything had gone so well.

But why?

"Why are you sighing, Your Majesty?"

Just then, having arrived without him noticing—

A girl was standing behind Arneus.

"Dame Millennia!?"

Jumping in surprise, Arneus stood up.

This girl was precisely the Holy Kingdom's cardinal who had incited him to ascend to the imperial throne.

"I shall personally pay the Academy town a visit."

"S-Say that again? But if the Holy Kingdom intervenes with military force, inevitably—"

If that were to happen, the imperial council would definitely hold him accountable.

"The Holy Kingdom's forces will not be deployed. I intend to perform an experiment at that location."

"An experiment?"

"—Indeed. To erase the entire Academy town from the face of the earth."

Chapter 6 - Retaking the Imperial Capital

Part 1

"...Hm, mmm...?"

Kamito woke up to find a soft feeling against his nose.

Delicate strands of hair were brushing against his cheek. Slender fingers were gently combing Kamito's black hair.

It looked like someone was stroking his head. In a state of shallow slumber, Kamito noticed.

What a nostalgic feeling. He remembered this had taken place often in his childhood.

He heard a beautiful singing voice overhead.

Her singing was also something he had heard frequently when he was young.

"...Restia?"

Kamito moved slightly under the sheets.

Immediately, Restia's lullaby stopped.

"Did you sleep well, Kamito?"

She smiled.

She was apparently reclined by the pillow, gazing directly at Kamito's sleeping face.

"Uh, yeah..."

Feeling his heart beat fast, Kamito sat up. Because Est and Restia refused to back down last night, he had no choice but to allow the three of them to sleep together on the same bed.

"Hua... Good morning, Kamito."

Just then, Est rubbed her eyes and woke up.

...She was still in the same state as during last night, naked except for kneesocks.

"Last night was so fun, Miss Sword Spirit. All of us, spinning round and round."

Restia chuckled. Although spirits sharing the same contractor would often bicker, Restia seemed to have a soft side for Est too.

"I do not deny it, darkness spirit."

Est expressionlessly nodded.

...It seemed like she quite enjoyed that rotating bed.

"Wait, it would've been impossible to sleep had it kept spinning nonstop."

Scratching his head, Kamito muttered.

—Just then...

Kamito heard lively footsteps. The door was suddenly flung open.

"K-Kamito, bad news...!"

Claire barged in with panic on her face.

"...Wait a sec, w-what are you doing with your contracted spirits!?"

Seeing the scene on the bed, Claire cried out, blushing to her ears.

"H-Hold on, this is—"

Kamito frantically tried to explain, but was completely unconvincing, given that Restia, dressed in a seductive nightgown, and Est, naked except for kneesocks, were leaning against him.

"Fufu, would you girls like to join in?"

"Eh? ...N-Nonsense, w-what nonsense are you talking about!?"

"H-How improper! Go to hell, turn into kebab!"

Entering together with Claire, Ellis drew the sword at her waist.

"We already were kebab..."

"Say that again, what do you mean?"

Holding her sword, Ellis asked in puzzlement.

"E-Enough already! A-Anyway, come quick!"

Part 2

In a hall of the imperial villa, the other team members were already seated at the table. Apart from Rubia, Fianna and Rinslet, Muir and Velsaria were also present.

Muir looked quite drowsy, nodding off to sleep.

Spread on the table was a large map.

On further examination, it seemed to be a map of the Ordesia Empire and the surroundings.

"You are late. What on earth were you doing?"

Just as Kamito was looking at the map, Rubia suddenly scolded him.

"Nothing, just sleeping in my room..."

"He was apparently enjoying a spirit rotation until late night."

With a cold tone of voice, Claire told on Kamito to her sister.

"What did you say?"

Hearing that, Rubia glared strictly at Kamito.

"...F-Forget that. What the heck happened?"

Kamito hastily changed the subject and cast his gaze on the map.

There were a number of wooden colored pieces placed on the map. These pieces were also used by the Academy during lessons for tactical training.

"Last night, a student rebellion broke out at Areishia Spirit Academy."

"...What?"

Kamito's groggy mind was jolted fully awake instantly.

Taking a closer look, he saw that there was a piece placed at the Academy's

location indeed.

"...And the cause?"

"It started with the Imperial Knights arresting students who were protesting against them. The existing embers of discontent flared up even more as a result."

"So from there it sparked into a full blaze?"

Rubia nodded slowly.

"Reportedly, the students rallied around the Sylphid Knights and erected large scale barriers in the Academy town's Undine district. Their resistance is still ongoing."

"Still ongoing? So the knights haven't deployed militarized spirits yet?"

As Ordersia's proper army, the Imperial Knights should find it a piece of cake to squash a student rebellion if they were serious. Since they had yet to take action, it meant that they were still observing the situation.

"I suppose. If they were to attack students using militarized spirits, they would be criticized not only within the Empire but by all the other nations. I presume they are passing this off to the outside world as just a student protest instead of a rebellion."

"I see—"

...However, it was just a matter of time.

Even without using militarized spirits, the garrison at the Academy were proper spirit knights, after all.

"What about the Academy town residents?"

"They have already been forced to evacuate. The Empire has sealed all town gates, refusing entry to everyone."

"So they are gearing up for a suppression battle."

Claire murmured.

"What comes next is the real deal."

"—How so?"

"Rallying to support the rebellion at the Academy, the nobles in the anti-Emperor faction have mobilized their forces."

Fianna spoke up.

Kamito now understood that the pieces scattered across the Empire represented these nobles.

"The students at Areishia Spirit Academy are all daughters from noble families. Oppressing the Academy has caused resentment against the Emperor to explode."

"My homeland of Laurenfrost seems to be ready to march too."

Rinslet pointed at a wolf-shaped piece.

"House Fahrengart is on the Emperor's side."

Ellis murmured sadly.

The great noble house of Duke Fahrengart's had served the Ordesia's imperial family for generations. Ellis' grandfather was probably planning to remain loyal to the very end even if the Emperor was incompetent.

"Do the nobles of the rebellion have a chance of winning?"

Rubia shook her head at the question.

"The rebels are all minor lords. Given their present numbers, it is futile."

She spoke in a merciless voice.

"However, if a leader were to make an appearance in this rebellion, perhaps the neutral nobles who are observing the situation might be swayed to join us."

"You mean Fianna?"

"Indeed. The Empire's many citizens are hoping for the second princess' return."

Rubia nodded.

Kamito looked at Fianna, only to see her nod as well.

(...So she's committed her resolve already, huh?) "If I do not return now, it

would be tantamount to forsaking the rebels who had stood up to resist Arneus."

...She was right. However, everyone present apart from Muir must be thinking the same question right now.

Even if Fianna returned to her country, facing the powerful Empire, was there really a chance for victory?

Presumably guessing what everyone was thinking, Rubia spoke up.

"The situation will develop very differently as soon as we secure a stronghold to serve as a symbol for the resistance."

"You mean the Academy, right?"

Claire said.

Indeed, Areishia Spirit Academy was a symbolic location in Ordesia.

If the rebel army took control of this place, the map of allegiance could change completely.

"Are the rebel nobles marching on the Academy?"

Velsaria, who had been silent until now, asked. If they were rallying to support the students, they ought to be sending reinforcements— "No, the Academy is surrounded by territory under the Empire's direct control. It would turn into full scale war if they sent troops there. Currently, they are probably at the stage of mustering their forces and observing the situation."

The lords in the anti-Emperor faction were probably waiting to see Fianna and Dracunia's next move.

Arneus was probably doing the same.

"So what do we do? From the position of Legitimate Ordesia."

Towards Kamito's question, Rubia picked up a piece on the map.

"We will split up into two parties. Fianna and I will march on the imperial capital to draw the Empire's attention."

Saying that, she placed a piece on Laurenfrost territory.

"The rest of you will head to the Academy."

Then she placed another piece at Areishia Spirit Academy.

"To the Academy—"

"Just us, is that correct?"

"Indeed."

Seeing Claire and Rinslet surprised, Rubia nodded in confirmation.

"Hasn't the Academy turned into a stronghold held by the Imperial Knights?"

Spirit knights were elite elementalists. In addition, they were equipped with militarized spirits.

Rushing into that kind of place would be totally reckless.

"There is no need to seize the Academy. All you need to do is fight alongside the resisting students and defeat the Imperial Knights attacking them. Once the resistance has gone on for some time, the neutral nobles will be swayed to our side."

"That sounds simple."

Velsaria commented.

"First of all, how do we enter the Academy town?"

Ellis asked. According to what had just been said, Areishia Spirit Academy and the surrounding territory were under the Emperor's direct control. In the current situation, passing through there to reach the Academy was probably difficult.

However, Kamito guessed what Rubia would say next.

"Through the Spirit Forest."

Ellis and the others looked at each other.

The vast Spirit Forest was part of the Academy's lands. Powerful spirits inhabited the forest, preventing trespassers.

"Indeed, no one would expect that route."

Claire concurred.

A large invading army was definitely impossible. However, pushing through the forest with a few elementalists might be doable.

"No matter what, the rebellion of mere students will be easily crushed as this rate. Let's do it."

"...You're right."

"I agree."

Hearing what Claire said, everyone resolved themselves and nodded.

"—So it is settled. Make preparations immediately. Time is of the essence."

Part 3

Port Areishia, the town affiliated with Areishia Spirit Academy, was commonly called the Academy town.

It was a planned city built with the Academy's school buildings as the center and designed to serve both spirits and elementalists.

In one part of the town, Undine district, students and some of the teachers had erected sturdy road barricades to keep up resistance against the Imperial Knights.

The conflict started from the Imperial Knights, that had effectively occupied the Academy, arresting student organizations that were protesting in front of the school building. With this as the trigger, all the resentment against the Imperial Knights' injustice exploded in one go, turning into a riot that even roped in teachers.

The fires of conflict instantly spread. Right now, the situation had turned into something the entire Empire was watching.

Unable to use militarized spirits against students, who hailed from noble families, the Imperial Knights had to catch rebels one by one. At the same time, the students had home field advantage because they were deeply familiar with the Academy town's complicated layout.

However, the Empire could not possibly allow this to continue for long.

Now that news had spread throughout the Empire, within twenty-four hours, the Empire would probably steel itself to mobilize militarized spirits to solve the problem.

Late at night, in the Academy town that was filled with false peace, a traveler was on the road.

She was petite, wearing a gray hooded cloak.

She also had a silver mask on her face.

Given the current situation, no would be going out alone. The Imperial Knights usually took action in squads of three or more, whereas the students would not leave their barriers to go outside the barricades.

The gates of the Academy town were all sealed. In theory, no travelers could get in or out.

The traveler walked in darkness. Carried at her waist was a crimson long sword with ominous decoration. Compared to her petite figure, it looked quite mismatched.

Just then, three knights in military uniform appeared in front of the girl.

A squad of Imperial Knights. They were patrolling the streets.

"Who are you?"

The leader questioned.

Without saying a word, the masked figure lightly drew the crimson long sword at her waist.

Chapter 7 - Return to the Academy

Part 1

Twenty-eight hours after setting off from Zohar, Kamito's team took a land route to enter the Spirit Forest in the Alzanu earldom bordering the Theocracy.

Just as Rubia had predicted, slipping into Ordesia was not that hard. Although Earl Alzanu was among the nobles on the Emperor's side, he had not deployed any troops to monitor the Spirit Forest, a notoriously terrifying realm.

(...I guess only suicidal armies would invade this kind of forest.) It was night. Kamito's team were forcing a march through the dense and lush forest.

Since it was a new moon tonight, there was no moonlight in the forest. However, even during a full moon, moonlight would likely have trouble penetrating such a dense forest.

The ground was illuminated by nothing more than the flame on Scarlet's tail.

"...So eerie. I can clearly sense breathing, but there are no sounds from wild beasts at all."

"The Spirit Forest hates living things. Looks like we're not welcome."

Hearing Claire's murmurs, Kamito replied.

"Avoid making noise as much as possible. The spirits in the forest dislike outsiders."

"Yes, I know."

Across the human realm, the Spirit Forest was the location closest to Astral Zero. In the depths where the density of divine power was highest, it was not

unusual to encounter archdemon-class spirits.

(...Greyworth brought me here before.)

Just then, Kamito recalled an unpleasant memory.

Even though he was trained as an assassin at the Instructional School, abandoning the twelve-year-old Kamito in this kind of place was not something a normal person would do.

That being said, this was undoubtedly the fastest route to the Academy.

Assuming safety considerations could be ignored, of course.

"Onii-sama, this is scary♪"

Squish.

Holding Kamito's arm, Muir pressed her developing bosom against it.

Even though she was only thirteen, her chest was starting to show bounciness.

"M-Muir!?"

"H-Hold it right there, get away from him now!"

"No. Onee-chan, isn't his other hand free anyway?"

"Gunununu..."

Sparks flew from Claire's twintails as though they had ignited.

"Settle down, you two. The spirits in the forest have started to clamor."

Walking in the lead, Ellis warned.

"Captain, have we not reached the Academy's area yet?"

"We should be close..."

Ellis murmured. Perched on her arm, Simorgh crowed.

In the forest, maps and compasses were completely useless.

All they could rely on were directions from Simorgh whose hunting grounds was the forest.

Eight hours had gone by since they entered the Spirit Forest. Even for well-

trained elementalists, advancing through a danger-filled forest in the night without any rest would naturally be quite exhausting.

"I'll give you a piggyback ride if you're too tired. Just tell me, don't be shy."

"I-I can still manage!"

"The Temple of the Contract should be up ahead."

"The Temple of the Contract?"

"It's where I released Est."

Claire glanced at Kamito beside her and explained.

"Really? So we're around there..."

It was a place where Kamito had suffered greatly soon after transferring into the Academy. In order to protect Claire from Est who had gone out of control, Kamito intervened and established a spirit contract with Est.

Failing to obtain Est, Claire had complained and insisted on taking Kamito as her slave spirit— (...Now that I think back, everything started at that temple.) Kamito reminisced with emotions stirring within him.

Although it was merely a couple months of time, those bewildering days at the Academy really felt longer to him than the three years he spent wandering around in search of Restia.

"Y-You jerk! You're remembering the sight of my naked body, a-and groping my chest, right!?"

Claire glared obliquely at Kamito.

"What? I have never heard of this!"

"This is my first time hearing of it!"

Ellis and Rinslet interrogated.

"Y-You've got it wrong! It was Claire herself, swinging Flametongue around wildly..."

"...! What, you did grope me there, didn't you!? And you even said something about poorly developed breasts and having no interest in a child's body, right!?"

(...Crap, now I've really poked a hornet's nest!?) Probably recalling her experience from that time, Claire flew into a rage.

"Poor you! Claire, your breasts have grown even if only a little!"

"Wait a sec, Rinslet!?"

"Onii-sama, I can't believe you said you're not interested in a child's body. I can't let that slide!"

While the group began to fight—

"Quiet, all of you—"

Velsaria, who had been quiet so far, spoke sternly.

Scolded by the former captain of the Sylphid Knights, Claire and the girls could not help but stand up straight.

Velsaria placed her hand on the sword at her waist and kept staring into the darkness.

Deep behind the crisscrossing trees, there was a deer with large antlers.

"That's—"

"An ancient divine beast spirit inhabiting the Spirit Forest. Do not make a sound."

"...!?"

Everyone held their breaths. This was a high-tier spirit whose appearance had become identical to an animal's.

"I never expected to encounter a spirit of that level not that deep in the forest..."

"I guess we'd better make a detour now."

"Yes, no matter how much longer a path it takes—"

Just as Claire quietly prepared to retreat.

Whoosh, there was a sound of something slicing through the air.

Countless shadows attacked Kamito's group from between the trees.

"...!?"

Kamito hastily jumped and slashed the shadows closing on his feet.

However, Kamito was the only one who managed to react to the sudden incident in the nick of time.

"Hyah, hyahhhhh!"

"Kyahhh, what is it doing... Ahhh♪"

Shadows resembling tentacles ensnared the young ladies' legs within the blink of an eye, tying them up onto the trees.

"...Guh... W-What is this...? Uwah, d-do not touch me there!"

Deprived of her armor, Ellis' voluptuous bosom was vulnerable to all kinds of groping.

"D-Damn it... I cannot believe I would end up, ah..."

Suspended in a bizarre pose, Velsaria was thrashing her limbs, struggling.

Her innocent skirt was boldly lifted. Kamito could see her pure white panties seductively wrapped around the well-developed root of her thighs.

"...! R-Ren Ash—Kazehaya Kamito, what are you staring at!?"

"N-No—"

Glared at by her ice-blue eyes, Kamito frantically avoided eye contact.

"Yahh, Onii-sama, save me...♪"

Muir was the only one who seemed a little happy.

Kamito approached the wriggling tentacles with the glowing Demon Slayer.

Very quickly, he saw the true identity of the tentacles.

...It looked like they were merely plant vines.

"They seem harmless."

Kamito exhaled in relief.

"What are you talking about? Aren't I harmed right now? Hyahhhhhhhhh♪"

"I-It has even made its way into my underwear... Nnnn♪"

"...I-In front of Kamito... Huahhh♪"

Entangled by vines, the young ladies kept moaning.



"Meow?"

Kamito did not know if Scarlet thought her master was playing or if it was due to a cat's instincts, but Scarlet kept jumping around nearby.

"K-Kamito, stop watching and start helping!"

"I-I got it!"

Kamito hastily swung the Demon Slayer.

Just then—

"What are you people doing here!?"

A girl's voice echoed throughout the dense forest.

"...! Y-You're—?"

Kamito turned around—

Only to see a familiar girl riding the back of a giant wolf.

Part 2

Inside a certain temple in the forest, fire light was flickering. Hanging on the wall were large decorations made of bones. The pungent smell of herbs filled the air.

"My apologies to you all."

Saying that, the girl bowed towards Kamito's group sitting by the fire.

Her blue eyes were as clear as a lake's surface. She had platinum blonde hair.

Like Kamito and his friends, she was wearing the Academy's uniform.

The girl's name was Horin Shareilia.

She was the druid girl of Team Cernunnos.

A powerful user of a beast swarm spirit, she had defeated Kamito and Claire before in the school tournament. She was one of only a handful of powerful elementalists in the Academy.

Earlier, Kamito and the girls had triggered the traps she had laid in the forest.

"No, we were in the wrong for trespassing."

Kamito apologized. This part of the forest was apparently something like her backyard.

Born in a forest clan, Shareilia was a rare elementalist not hailing from a noble family.

Because of that, even though she was attending the Academy, she obtained special permission to live inside this Spirit Forest together with animals.

"If your home is here, that means that Academy town isn't far off, right?"

Claire asked while drinking herbal tea.

"Hmm, you will soon reach it after going down the hill."

"How are things at the Academy town?"

"...Hmm, sorry."

Shareilia shook her head at Ellis' question.

She was still in the forest when conflict broke out between the students and the Imperial Knights, which was why she could not return to the Academy. Left without a choice, she came to this temple to sleep. As it so happened, Kamito and his group triggered the traps in the yard.

"Why did you set traps like those?"

"It would be dangerous if students accidentally wandered into the forest."

Hearing Rinslet's warning...

"—I set them to prevent those people from damaging the historical sites in the forest."

She replied with a serious look.

"Did you say historical sites?"

Claire and the others exchanged glances.

There were many historical sites in the Spirit Forest, dating back to the age of myths.

For example, the temple dedicated to worshiping Est was one of these sites. The most famous historical site in the forest was probably the gate that allowed people to teleport to Astral Zero.

"Hmm, a bunch of weird looking people entered the forest and took away the gate historical site near the lake."

"Took away? How do they take away—"

"They used militarized spirits—"

Shareilia spoke with chagrin.

According to her, the suspicious group had released militarized spirits in the forest, slicing apart the giant rock that constituted the historical site and carried it away.

"They are not the Empire's knights?"

Ellis asked.

"I don't know. All of them were wearing strange masks. Animals have left because these people chopped down trees in the forest."

"It is hard to believe the Imperial Knights doing something like this—"

Ancient sites were products left behind from a past age when Astral Zero and the human realm were one. The technology of modern spiritology was unable to replicate the power of even the most basic historical sites.

Thus, historical sites were protected by international treaty. Let alone damaging them, even moving them was strictly prohibited. If the Empire's army had taken away the site, it would surely draw violent criticism from domestic nobles and foreign nations.

"What are they planning by taking a historical site away?"

"...I have a bad feeling about this."

"Yeah, we better hurry—"

Kamito nodded. Hearing that, Shareilia stood up and whistled.

"There is a shortcut to the Academy town ahead. I asked wolves to lead the way for you."

Part 3

S.. Scr... Screeeeeeeeech...!

The noise of something massive being dragged could be heard at a large training ground at Areishia Spirit Academy.

Under the Imperial Knights' supervision, several large militarized spirits of type Glasya-Labolas were combining gigantic stones together, each as tall as themselves.

This was the historical site they had stolen from the Spirit Forest, the gate dating back to age of myths.

"Excellent. This is sufficient for the gate."

Sitting on the shoulder of a militarized spirit, a girl spoke.

Millennia Sanctus, a cardinal of the Holy Kingdom.

She was separate from the Millennia at the imperial palace in the capital, yet also the same being.

The ability to exist simultaneously across anywhere in space was part of her powers as a spirit.

The militarized spirits were employed by the Holy Kingdom's warrior priestesses instead of the Imperial Knights.

Wearing pure white masks, they belonged to an execution force under the direct command of Des Esseintes— Moving a gate from the age of myths. Despite such an atrocity happening before their eyes, Ordesia's Imperial Knights were unable to intervene.

Because Cardinal Millennia came here bearing a decree from Emperor Arneus.

The Empire's knights were merely informed that the gate was to be used to

perform a large-scale summoning magic experiment.

"Dame Millennia, the third set is complete. Do we begin as planned?"

Just then, a masked warrior priestess reported.

"Very well, let us begin as soon as possible."

Saying that, Millennia curled her lips and smiled.

"—The very first Astral Shift."

Part 4

Led by forest wolves along a shortcut, Kamito's team emerged to instantly see the familiar scenery of the Academy town.

Surrounded by town walls, the center of the town showed the use of search lights.

That was the location of Areishia Spirit Academy's school building.

The barricades set up by the student resistance were in the Undine district where small theaters, cafes, clothing stores and various entertainment facilities were gathered.

This was the part of town most familiar to students. Kamito and his friends frequently went there to shop and even held a party in a restaurant once.

There was still plenty of time before dawn.

Overhead were flying militarized spirits with search lights.

"Don't look up, be careful of getting spotted."

In the shadow under trees, Claire whispered.

"Hmph, as a noble, I do not sneak around. Allow me to show you how to shoot down that thing."

Rinslet drew her bow confidently.

"Hold on—Stop it!"

Claire hastily pulled her back by her hair.

One could hear the sound of a neck cracking.

"That really hurts! What are you doing!?"

Rinslet protested with tears in her eyes.

"The patrolling militarized spirits are all connected. As soon as you attack, the

army will know where we are."

Watching them, Muir said with exasperation.

"This level of security is nothing. Let's hurry."

"Wait, Muir. You're fine on your own, but we'll definitely get spotted if we move with this number of people."

"Oh my, Onii-sama, just kill whoever sees us."

Muir replied innocently.

...Those with Instructional School origins were all like this. Kamito sighed.

Nothing needed to be said about Kamito and Muir's prowess. Claire and Ellis were somewhat capable of stealth operations, but Rinslet and Velsaria did not quite seem suited to infiltration.

"Fufu, looks like it is my turn to enter the stage—"

Just then, Restia reverted to her original form and spread her jet-black wings.

"Do you have a solution?"

Hearing Kamito's question, Restia began to chant spirit magic.

"O dark night, clothe me as a robe of black—Darkness Mist."

Kamito's group was instantly covered by black mist.

"Hyah! W-What is this!?"

"Totally pitch black!"

"Spirit magic of the darkness element. With this, you can go about unseen, hidden in darkness."

"But my vision is dark too. How can we do anything like this?"

"Your eyes will soon adjust."

Just as Restia claimed, the darkness covering their vision gradually turned clear.

It was apparently possible to look out of the mist.

"I see, that's really handy."

Kamito exclaimed.

Covered in black mist, Kamito's group used wind magic to land on the town wall.

Unnoticed by the patrolling militarized spirits, they made their way towards the Undine district. In addition to hiding them from view, the Darkness Mist magic apparently erased footsteps and presence too.

Just as they reached a wall that separated districts— "...Someone's coming."

Kamito turned around and stopped his team.

...The footsteps of multiple people running were approaching.

"Imperial Knights?"

Claire asked quietly?

"Who knows? Compared to the sound of military boots, they sound a bit light —"

"...Wait, this noise is familiar."

Ellis realized with surprise. She chanted wind spirit magic to gather surrounding sound.

"This is Rakka's sound. And also the Sylphid Knights—"

"Really?"

"Yes, unmistakable—"

Ellis nodded at Claire's question.

Soon after, girls in the Academy's uniform appeared. Wearing the Sylphid Knights armor on top, they were familiar to Kamito.

"Rakka! And Reishia—"

As soon as Ellis called out to them, the black mist automatically disengaged.

"...Captain!?"

Ellis was originally teammates with Rakka before joining Team Scarlet for the Blade Dance. Rakka rushed over.

"I apologize for worrying you."

"So you are safe, Captain—"

Likewise another former teammate of Ellis', Reishia teared up.

"Excuse me, Captain, why are you and your team here?"

Just then, Rakka asked.

Thus, Ellis gave brief and simple explanation of what led them to come over to reclaim the Academy.

"I see. That is reassuring."

Reishia replied happily.

"Everyone will be so encouraged now that the Blade Dance's victorious team has returned to the Academy."

"Then why are you here? Isn't everyone in Undine district?"

"We came to collect supplies. After all, the town gates are shut."

Rakka answered Claire's question. Although the Undine district itself had many restaurants and did not lack food, most daily necessities had to be moved from the Sylph district, their current location.

"Of course, we keep records at all the shops where we have borrowed supplies. The Sylphid Knights will pay off every debt."

"It is an emergency, after all. You had no choice."

Hearing Reishia's explanation, Ellis nodded.

"How many Imperial Knights are garrisoned in the Academy?"

Kamito asked.

"At least a hundred or so regular knights. The commander is Dame Alendora of the Numbers."

"Dame Alendora huh—"

Velsaria crossed her arms and murmured.

"Do you know her, Velsaria?"

"Seventh of the Numbers. I heard that she is quite accomplished."

"A hundred spirit knights, and on top of that, a member of the Numbers huh..."

Considering each spirit knight was each a formidable warrior in their own right, one could say that the Ordesia Empire had gathered substantial military force here. In addition, they probably possessed plenty of militarized spirits.

"On the student side, there are not a lot of people who can fight. The majority of the teachers are researchers and students using combat-oriented contracted spirits are in the minority. It is anyone's guess how long the barriers and barricades will hold—"

The usually cheerful Rakka spoke in a somber tone of voice.

"In any case, let us head to the barricades first. Please lead the way."

"Yes, right away!"

"Everyone will surely welcome you, Captain."

Hearing Ells, Rakka and Reishia nodded.

Just then, the glow of the Demon Slayer's blade flashed.

"Kamito, I sense an ominous aura."

"Est?"

"Yes, I feel it too—"

Restia agreed.

"What is that!?"

Restia pointed into the air.

"...What the hell!?"

Kamito widened his eyes in shock.

A gigantic pillar of light had appeared at the Academy's school building.

The pillar of light went straight up into the clouds, opening a large hole in the sky.

Eerie red light leaked out from between the clouds, pouring onto the town at night.

At the same time...

There were repeated sounds of explosions in the distance.

"What is that noise?"

"—The barricades are in that direction!"

Rakka shouted and started running towards the sound.

Chapter 8 - The Demon Realm Brought Forth

Part 1

A gigantic pillar of fire erupted on the street. The atmosphere shook.

The blazing flame in the black night illuminated the bizarre scene.

"What is that!?"

Rushing nearby, Kamito could not help but gawk, rooted to the spot.

Countless cracks were produced in the air—

Terrifying xenomorphic beings were crawling out from these cracks.

Although the xenomorphs had different appearances, in terms of numbers there were at least a couple hundred.

"...! Demon spirits, where are so many coming from!?"

Claire shouted.

Demon spirits was an umbrella term for spirits whose peculiar mental structure made it impossible for them to form contracts with elementalists.

The majority of demon spirits were violent in nature and would even have a tendency to attack humans and other spirits.

However, there had been virtually no reports of demon spirits manifesting in the human realm.

Even though there were elementalists like Sjora Kahn, known as witches and capable of commanding demon spirits, they were exceptions, after all.

"Why are demon spirits in the Academy town?"

"Looks like it's got something to do with that bizarre gate..."

Kamito looked up at the giant hole in the air above the Academy's school building.

The demon spirits were apparently attacking the barricades erected by the students. Although the students had deployed barriers to resist, at this rate, their defenses were going to be breached.

"Rakka, you girls go protect the barricades. Let us take care of the demon spirits."

Ellis gave directions to her Sylphid Knight comrades.

"Captain, but..."

"Worry not. Despite their numbers, I do not see any particularly strong foe."

"Yes, leave it to us."

Saying that, Ellis and Claire deployed their elemental waffen.

Rakka silently nodded and ran towards the barricades.

Noticing their movements, the demon spirits pounced on them.

However—

"I shall not allow them to succeed! Freezing fangs of ice, go forth and pierce—
Freezing Arrow!"

Magic arrows of ice poured down like rain, piercing dozens of demon spirits in one go.

Rinslet went "hmph" and tossed her hair with pride.

"I shall provide cover fire. Very well, make haste—"

"...! You have my utmost gratitude, daughter of Margrave Laurenfrost!"

The Sylphid Knight students were surrounded by countless arrows of ice. The demon spirits pouncing on them had all been pierced by Rinslet's accurate marksmanship.

"Lowly demon spirits, how dare you trample the Academy town under our protection—"

Tranquil rage could be seen in Velsaria's ice-blue eyes. She placed her hand on her chest.

Inside a spirit crystal glowing with ominous light, her fortress spirit was sealed.

The Juggernaut was a spirit of mass destruction, capable of slaughtering even archdemon-class spirits.

If she were to use this power, annihilating the demon spirits in one breath would be easy.

"My esteemed sister—"

Just as she was about to deploy her spirit, Ellis grabbed her arm.

"...?"

"Your fortress spirit is too draining. Leave this to us—"

"Oh? You are commanding me now, Ellis?"

Velsaria looked at her adoptive sister and smiled fearlessly.

"...! My esteemed sister, I—"

"No, I am praising you."

Velsaria shook her head and put down her hand.

"That power of yours that had matured during the Blade Dance. Show it fully to me."

"Y-Yes!"

Ellis instantly straightened her back and picked up Ray Hawk.

"Muir's militarized spirits will make short work of these things, but let Muir have a look at these Onee-chans' abilities first."

Saying that, Muir nimbly jumped onto a rooftop.

"Wait, come on...!"

"No, that is perfect."

Kamito stopped Claire, who was glaring at Muir.

Muir's special power, the Jester's Vise, was akin to a curse and would drive militarized spirits to the point of collapsing.

Before they figured out why demon spirits were appearing in great numbers, it would be best to keep such a trump card unused.

"The three of us are doing it. Claire, what formation?"

"The anti-army Blitz Lightning—Wipe them out in one go."

"—Got it."

"Understood!"

Kamito, Claire and Ellis deployed their respective elemental waffen.

Team Scarlet had used code names for their tactical formations in order to win the Blade Dance tournament. There were a total of twenty-four combinations, capable of rapidly adjusting to enemy characteristics on the battlefield. Since their core defense, Fianna, was absent, while Rinslet was providing support fire at the barricades, the formation was undertaken by the three of them this time.

Kamito, the close combat specialist, was in the center, flanked by Claire and Ellis.

This was a super offensive formation abandoning all defense, seeking to blitz the enemy.

"Let's go—Est, Restia!"

"Yes, Kamito. Your wish is my command—"

"Fufu, let's go wild."

Pouring divine power into the twin swords of steel and darkness, Kamito rushed into the crowd of demon spirits.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Third Form—Shadowmoon Waltz, Black Thunder Dual Strike!"

The Demon Slayer in his right hand sliced through the black night with a trail of silver-white light.

The Vorpall Sword in his left hand devoured darkness, spreading jet-black

lightning all around.

Wherever Kamito went, the torrent of white and black followed him like a shadow, mercilessly tearing apart each and every demon spirit.

"We're going too, Scarlet!"

Claire swung Flametongue.

With a whoosh, there was a sound slicing through the air— "All of you, turn into charcoal—Flare Blaze!"

In the next instant, the demon spirits in front of her were all set aflame.

This was a move executed by imbuing Flametongue with the ultimate spirit magic of Hell Blaze. Following the slash that swept through darkness, scorching flames kept surging to devour demon spirits nonstop.

With her crimson twintails flying in the air, she danced spectacularly in the night, reminiscent of Rubia's ritual dance performance.

As for the barricades in the streets, the students were in disarray due to the sudden arrival of Kamito's team.

Under the holy light of an isolation barrier, noisy voices sounded.

"Isn't that Team Scarlet!?"

"That problem child from Raven Class, Claire Rouge the Hell Cat!"

"That boy... Uh, Kazehaya... The Lecherous King... That's right, the Lecherous King!"

"Demon King of the Night!"

...Despite the odd comment mixed in there, it looked like they had noticed the arrival of comrades at least.

"Ellis, counting on you over there!"

"Yes—!"

Running, Ellis spun Ray Hawk and flew.

Then—

"Fahrengart Style of the Spear—Wind of Death!"

With a terrifying technique name, she launched her spear towards the remaining demon spirits.

The magic spear flew like a bolt of lightning and kept piercing demon spirits.

It was an absolutely unavoidable spear strike, guaranteed to hit.

With her residual momentum, Ellis landed on the barricade.

"Heh, that's pretty good."

Seeing that, Muir whistled from the rooftop.

Under the combined attacks of Kamito's team, the demon spirits were virtually wiped out.

Part 2

As Kamito and company made their way to the barricade, the students instantly cheered.

After all, they were the victorious team at the Blade Dance tournament. From the seniors down to the lower years, no one did not recognize Kamito's team.

"Th-The Demon King of the Night is coming, what shall I do..."

"I heard you'll get pregnant just by meeting his gaze—"

"But just now, he looked a bit cool, right?"

"Y-Yes, that's true..."

...However, Kamito's fame seemed to have a different source.

Just then—

"—Perfect timing."

A familiar voice was heard from amid the students.

"Freya-sensei!"

Out came Raven Class' homeroom teacher, Ms Freya Grandol.

Evidently, she had taken part in the student uprising movement.

"I have heard the gist from them. Welcome."

Saying that, Ms Freya motioned with her gaze towards Rakka and the others further in.

While Kamito and his friends were fighting the demon spirits, the Sylphid Knight girls had apparently told the teacher about them.

"We've heard about roughly what happened here too. Things are crazy."

"Indeed, who could have expected the glorious Imperial Knights to have

summoned demon spirits?"

Ms Freya spoke quietly with a look of disdain.

"What exactly are those demon spirits...?"

"—No idea."

Freya shook her head at Claire's question.

"I just saw a pillar of light appear over the Academy and then suddenly they were here."

"Who could have expected demon spirits to appear in the human realm..."

"That is completely unheard of."

Rinslet nodded with a strange expression.

Just as she had pointed out, demon spirits usually did not appear in the human realm.

Although Sjora Kahn had summoned a great horde of demon spirits during the Blade Dance tournament, it was only possible inside Astral Zero after all.

Right now, what on earth was happening?

"Regardless, it was all thanks to you that our defenses held up. Allow me to express my gratitude."

"Too soon to say that. There's no telling when those demon spirits might appear again."

Kamito looked towards the Academy's school building, staring at the pillar of light reaching to the sky.

"...True."

Saying that, Freya turned around and invited Kamito's group inside.

"This is no place to stand and chat. Come over, let us discuss our next step."

"Where are we going?"

"There is a restaurant nearby called the Sablefish Pavilion. It is perfect as a conference room."

"I know it. A commoner's shop, isn't it?"

"Yes, that is the place—"

It was where Vivan Melosa of Murders had lurked as a waitress.

Kamito remembered Est ordering an extra large parfait there. It was a crazy situation that time.

"Did anyone get hurt during the attack just now?"

With a pained expression, Ellis looked to the sides of the passage.

Several students were receiving treatment from spirit magic.

"Yes. But thanks to you guys, there were no deaths."

"We wouldn't have made it if she hadn't told us about a shortcut."

"Now that I think about it, I'm surprised we made it in time..."

"We have arrived—"

Freya pushed open the door of the Sablefish Pavilion under lighting.

"W-Welcome! Would you like some food? Or rest a little—Kyah!"

Just then, a girl walked briskly down the stairs— Then with a thud, she tripped over spectacularly.

"Ooooh~, it hurts..."

Rubbing her head while crawling up, this girl in a maid uniform was very familiar to them.

"Carol, are you alright!?"

"M-Milady!?"

The girl in the maid outfit swiftly stood up and threw herself into Rinslet's embrace.

"Milady, I have been so worried about you!"

"Yes, Carol, I have missed you so much."

The master and servant of the Laurenfrost family hugged each other tightly.



Part 3

While Kamito's group were on the run from the Empire and exiled to Dracunia, Carol had stayed at the Academy instead of returning to the Laurenfrost home.

Her intention was to endure and wait for her master's return as Rinslet's maid, but precisely because of that, she unfortunately got roped into the Academy rebellion.

"Milady, have you been well in my absence?"

Pulling out a chair for her master, Carol wiped the corner of her own eye.

"Yes, please rest assured."

"I-I see..."

Hearing that, Carol seemed a bit depressed.

"Ah, uh, of course, I was sad without seeing you!"

"M-Milady..."

Rinslet hastily covered for herself, prompting Carol to hug her tightly again.

"Carol, do you work at this shop?"

Just then, Claire asked.

"Yes, I work here part time."

"...You're quite resilient."

"Speaking of which, I also work at a crepe store."

It looked like she was quite serious about her work outside of being a maid.

"After the Academy came under occupation, what happened to our rooms?"

"The Knights took over Raven Class' dorm building, apparently to use as their

own quarters."

"...Well, figures."

Claire slumped her shoulders dejectedly.

"Did my precious books and treasures get thrown out?"

"So frustrating..."

"Please rest assured, Miss Claire."

"Eh?"

"All the personal belongings from your rooms are with me."

"R-Really!?"

"Yes, I took everything and ran when we were evicted."

"Well done, Carol."

"How wonderful!"

Carol smiled, took out a notebook and licked the end of her pen.

"Miss Rinslet's treasure box contains the Laurenfrost seal. Family heirloom, Dagger of Magic Ice. Also the doll given to her from Miss Claire when they seven, a toy ring from Miss Claire at age eight, also..."

"E-Enough!"

Rinslet blushed heavily and covered Carol's mouth.

"...Y-You kept them all as treasure."

Claire murmured softly.

"Miss Claire's personal belongings include canned peaches, textbooks on spiritology, buried deep in the shelves were *Noble Young Ladies Flourishing in the Night*, *Do you like wanton cats?*, *The Giant Bust Spirit Exists for Real*—"

"H-Hold on a second! Why do you know about hidden books!?"

"Excuse me, do all noble daughters read such racy books?"

"C-Certainly not!"

"Immoral books must be confiscated according to the rules."

Ellis spoke sternly.

"Miss Ellis' *Ren Ashbell-sama* Fan Club bulletin notes have been kept safely too."

"Th-Thank you so much! Those are precious materials impossible to gather again!"

Ellis held Carol's hands in gratitude.

(On the other hand, I'd rather burn it all immediately...) Kamito groaned in his mind.

Carol smiled happily and said: "Let me bring you something warm. I am sure all of you are hungry."

"Allow me to cook. Carol, are there any ingredients?"

"Yes. Though not a lot, we do have a bit of flour."

"Good enough. Claire, I am borrowing Scarlet."

"Meow—"

"Wait, Scarlet!"

Scarlet skipped along and followed Rinslet.

"Muir will help taste test."

Saying that, Muir ran into the kitchen too.

Watching the back of his adopted little sister, Kamito felt his heart warmed up.

Part 4

While Rinslet was in the kitchen, Kamito explained to Freya everything that had happened so far.

"—And so, we came back to take back the Academy."

"I see—"

The intelligent homeroom teacher soon understood his words and nodded.

"In other words, whether the Academy rebellion succeeds or not shall determine the shift in allegiances and the political landscape in the Empire."

"Yeah. Once news of the Academy's recapture spreads, the neutral nobles will throw their support behind Fianna."

"Indeed, calls for the second princess' return are not uncommon among the populace. News of your great achievement in the Theocracy in stopping Leviathan, have reached here too."

"The Empire's people all hope for Fianna's ascension to the throne."

Claire said.

"Indeed. Currently, Arneus' reign is poor no matter how you mince words. However, there are nobles who would rather accept an incompetent monarch than see the beautiful and wise princess in power."

"Have these people realized the shadow of the Holy Kingdom behind the current Emperor?"

"Of course they have. The Holy Kingdom's cardinal has been strutting about in Nefescal Palace. However, they still choose to obey and ingratiate themselves to those in power."

Ms Freya curled her gorgeous lips with mockery.

"By the way, I never expected the glorious Imperial Knights to resort to such

tricks—"

Ellis spoke loudly with anger on her face.

Having admired the Knights, she probably could not accept such an atrocity.

"So they have abandoned all scruples—"

Having installed a curse armament seal on herself before, Velsaria murmured.

"However, it is incomprehensible. Once news of releasing demon spirits against students spread out, it will surely cause a huge outrage."

"...That is true indeed."

Freya agreed with Claire.

Except for the Alphas Theocracy, demon spirits were taboo in every country.

If Ordesia's knights were to use them, it would bring all the countries on the continent to condemn them. The nobles in the Empire would also resent Arneus for authorizing such an act.

Also, if they were to quell the rebellion by any means necessary, they could have deployed militarized spirits directly. Why go such lengths to summon demon spirits?

"The summoning of demon spirits is a side effect at most."

"Restia?"

With a flutter of black feathers floating down, Restia appeared next to Kamito.

"Their true goal is probably something else."

"What do you mean?"

"What do you think that pillar of light is?"

Saying that, Restia looked out the window.

The pillar of light they had seen from the streets earlier, was currently penetrating the dense clouds in the sky.

Eerie red light was leaking from the gaps in the clouds.

Everyone shook their head silently. Evidently, even Freya was stumped.

"—That is a gate to the demon realm."

"Demon realm?"

"Yes, contrasting with the holy sanctuary, there is a place in Astral Zero known as the demon realm. It is where the majority of demon spirits reside."

Restia looked back at Kamito and the others.

"That pillar of light is the gate for opening a connection to there."

"A gate connecting to Astral Zero? How do you open something like—"

Mid-sentence, Claire widened her eyes.

"Don't tell me, they used the ruins from the spirit forest...!?"

"Yes, that is correct."

Restia nodded slowly.

"Such an immense gate is possible to open so long as resonance is produced from the power of multiple ruins. Those demon spirits earlier came from the demon realm through the gate."

"Then why would they do this...?"

"Then I have no idea..."

Saying that, she shook her head.

"But if we let it continue, the gate will swallow this town sooner or later."

"What did you say!?"

"What is going on!?"

Claire and Ellis shouted at the same time. Velsaria frowned too.

"Please look. Isn't the red glow between the clouds increasing?"

"...!"

Taking a closer look, she was right. The red light's brightness had increased from earlier.

That light came from Astral Zero, huh—

Suppose the gate continued to enlarge, then surely even bigger quantities of demon spirits than earlier would surge into the Academy town.

"...They must not succeed!"

Claire's ruby-like eyes burned with flames in them.

"Yes. As captain of the Sylphid Knights protecting the Academy, I shall not allow this to happen!"

Ellis stood up too.

"So what can we do?"

Just then, Ms Freya spoke.

"Since they are using the ruins' power to open the gate to the demon realm, all we need to do is destroy the ruins and the gate should vanish, right?"

"Indeed. Gates leading to Astral Zero are very unstable. Once the ruins are destroyed, it should vanish naturally."

Hearing Claire, Restia nodded.

"But the Academy has been turned into a fort by the Imperial Knights. Infiltrating will not be easy."

Velsaria pointed out.

"Can't we use your shadow magic to slip in, Ms Freya?"

"Unfortunately, that will not work. The army's alert line will be triggered."

"I see..."

Normally, it would not be a problem, but given the current situation, there were probably many sensing-type barriers set up. In that case, even Kamito and Muir would find it difficult to sneak in unnoticed.

"What about negotiations? Ellis knows many people in the Knights, right?"

"...Negotiations will probably be difficult. I have no right to criticize anyone, but the Imperial Knights are very stubborn."

"If even you say that, then their stubbornness is definitely no ordinary stubbornness."

Claire shrugged slightly.

"So that leaves storming in from the front huh—"

Kamito muttered.

"...That is the only way to go."

"Are you all serious?"

Asked Ms Freya.

"I know it's very reckless but I can't just stand back and watch the Academy get trampled by demon spirits."

Kamito nodded slowly.

"To me, the Academy is a very precious place."

"Kamito..."

Claire showed surprise as she looked at Kamito.

Equally surprised, Restia also looked at Kamito.

These were Kamito's true feelings that had slipped out naturally.

Even though he had only lived at the Academy for two months— Kamito had experienced so many new things for the first time during that period.

Encountering his comrades. Training night and day to participate in the team battles. Working part time in the Academy town, the Valentine Festival, training camp, mystery hot pot, and even hunting the legendary giant bust spirit.

Every incident was a precious memory for Kamito— And those memories were all born inside the place called Areishia Spirit Academy.

"Yes, me too."

Next, Ellis added.

"Me too, Kamito."

"It is the same for me!"

Just then, Rinslet came out of the kitchen, bringing sandwiches.

"These are Laurenfrost lucky charms."

"Very tasty."

Muir had her cheeks stuffed full... So cute, like a squirrel.

"But I disagree with storming in without a plan. Let us discuss our plan of action first."

"...I guess you're right."

Kamito steeped his hands on the table and fell into deep thought.

Indeed, breaking into the Academy from the front would probably be very hard.

Was there some way to cause a great diversion first— "...Oh."

Suddenly, Kamito thought of something.

"Say, Ellis—"

"What is it?"

"Back when I lost my memory, wasn't there a treasure vault of the Demon King that appeared underground of the Academy town?"

So he asked Ellis.

"Yes, that Burial Chamber, right?"

Ellis nodded. She had entered that Burial Chamber together with Kamito.

Indeed, that incident was the reason why the Imperial Knights started garrisoning the Academy in the first place.

Instigated by Millennia, the spirits in the Academy went on a rampage, causing a great calamity.

At the time, Kamito had amnesia due to the blow of losing Restia, but the after coming into contact with Est in the Burial Chamber under the Academy, he recovered his memory.

Summoned as result of Kamito's awakening, the Burial Chamber was where many artifacts and sealed spirits used by the legendary Demon King Solomon in the past were sealed.

"You're going to retrieve the Demon King's weapons, lying dormant in the

Burial Chamber, right?"

Claire instantly reacted.

But Ms Freya shook her head.

"Unfortunately, you are too late."

"Why?"

"Reportedly, the Imperial Knights have taken away all the treasure in the underground historical site. Ancient artifacts and powerful sealed spirits, I expect they are all being kept in the Academy's Sealed Library now."

This made sense too. It was only natural that the army would intervene when ancient and valuable artifacts had been dug up.

"Looks like your plan is foiled."

"No, not entirely. This is an opportunity, actually."

Saying that, Kamito reached into his chest pocket.

"Ah. Kamito, I know what you're thinking."

Seeing that, Restia whispered quietly.

As expected of his longtime partner.

"Yeah, we're gonna use everything at our disposal."

Part 5

Carrying Second Princess Fianna, Legitimate Ordesia's flagship, the Revenant, had met up with Dracunia's Flying Dragon Knights in Laurenfrost airspace.

Composed entirely of dragon riders, the Flying Dragon Knights were renowned as the continent's strongest.

There were even rumors that Dracunia had stubbornly refused to build a fleet of massive flying ships because they felt that military ships slower than dragon riders had no strategic value.

Under the moonlight, dozens of lying dragons were arranged in a neat and orderly formation.

On the ground, a great bonfire was lit at Winter Gulf Castle. The soldiers serving the family of Margrave Laurenfrost were preparing for battle in an orderly fashion.

Fianna and Rubia were standing on the deck to stoke up morale.

"The neutral nobles still have yet to declare their position."

While staring at the Kyria Mountain Range towering ahead, Fianna spoke.

Although there were a few nobles who had secret correspondence with her and had agreed to march, in the end, the only ones who responded to her call to take action were the anti-Arneus nobles.

"Until the situation clears up, I doubt they will take any action. However, once we recapture the Academy, the situation will tilt in our favor."

Rubia replied. There was no emotional fluctuation in her voice at all.

Fianna withdrew her hand from the railing on the ship's side.

"Are you worried about Claire?"



"..."

This time, Rubia did not answer.

However, Fianna did not miss the subtle tensing in her fingers.

"She will be fine. After all, Kamito-kun is there."

"Yes—"

The incoming wind caused the two girls' long hair to flutter.

At the latest, their war against the Empire was going to begin in the morning.

(...We must prevail against time.)

Fianna bit hard on her lip that had lost color in the cold wind.

Just then, the crystal in Rubia's hand glowed.

At the same time, a large image was projected in the air.

It was a pitch-black shadow with the appearance of a giant dragon.

"...! Lord Dragon King!"

Surprised, Fianna looked up.

"Princess of Ordesia, you have done very well in the mission to quell the Theocracy's civil war."

The giant dragon silhouette's solemn voice resounded across the entire deck.

"I hereby recognize Legitimate Ordesia as Dracunia's ally and pledge to fight the Holy Kingdom together."

"Thank you for your reinforcements, Lord Dragon King."

Fianna bowed deeply towards the image in the air.

"So, how is the battle situation?"

"More than half the nobles are taking the Emperor's side. The remainder will depend on the situation at the Academy."

"—Hmm, not unusual. The Academy is tantamount to the Empire's heart."

Dracunia's Dragon King spoke gravely.

"But rest assured. I have made arrangements on that front too."

"...What do you mean?"

Fianna blinked her dusk-colored eyes.

"I have sent the strongest *dragon* to that heart."

Part 6

"My esteemed sister, I leave this in your hands."

"Rest assured. I shall not let even an ant pass."

Facing Ellis, who was in front of the barricade looking back, Velsaria nodded briefly.

According to Claire's attack plan, Velsaria and Muir would stay behind to guard the barricade.

The attacking demon spirits were sure to be back. Since the gate connected to Astral Zero kept expanding, it was highly likely that the next wave would be bigger than the one before. Moreover, openings were about to appear in the barrier set up by the princess maidens.

Hence, it was necessary for Velsaria, capable of deploying the ultimate fortress spirit, and Muir, able to employ militarized spirits, to stay behind as guardians.

"Leave this to us, Captain."

Carrying her hammer elemental waffe on her shoulder, Rakka said.

"As Vice-Captain of the Sylphid Knights, I will protect the students well."

Saying that, Reishia nodded too.

"Yes, I wish you the best of luck."

Ellis shook hands firmly with her best friends.

"...Ah~ ah~, Muir wants to go raise hell with Onii-sama too."

Muir was pouting unhappily.

"Why must Muir protect small fry?"

"Because you're the best suited to it. Hunt down and clean up those demon

spirits."

Claire crossed her arms and said.

"Stop ordering others and acting all high and might, you flat-chested charcoal girl."

"W-What are you talking about!? Y-You're the flat-chested one!"

With twintails standing up on end, Claire roared angrily.

"Yeah~ right~, Muir is still growing. Right, Onii-sama?"

Saying that, Muir hugged Kamito's waist.

"Uh, yeah, right..."

Kamito placed his hand on Muir's head.

"Muir, I'm counting on you. Protect everyone."

He gently stroked her ash-gray hair.

"...O-Okay, got it, Onii-sama."

Muir partially closed her eyes in bliss and nodded obediently.

"Kamito, pet me too."

Seeing Est hug him too, Kamito began to pet her on the head at the same time.

"Hua..."

"Sheesh, all you do is indulge that adopted sister and Est!"

Seeing that, Claire was so angry that she cracked her whip loudly.

Behind Kamito and the others—

"Th-There is more, kyah—"

"Uwawa, milady, are you alright!?"

Passing out snacks to those in the front lines, Rinslet was surrounded by spirits.

"Rinslet, stop playing around. We have to go."

"I-I am not playing around!"

Kamito smiled wryly and looked out at Academy in the distance.

The pillar of light, rising into the clouds, it reminded him of the light from the sacred maiden he had seen at the Demon King City.

"Kamito, we are counting on you."

Hearing Ms Freya's words, Kamito nodded briefly.

Chapter 9 - Offense and Defense at the Academy

Part 1

Ominous clouds were hanging low in the sky.

Kamito and company were running in the Academy town where thick miasma was swirling.

Going through the Sylph district, a dense residential area, they rushed straight to the main entrance to the Academy's school building— This distance was quite short for a well-trained elementalist, but the worry was that more and more demon spirits would surge out from the dimensional gap as time went by.

(...We are in a race against time.)

Looking up at the giant gate in the sky, Kamito muttered to himself.

"The Academy's school building is in sight."

"Charge it in one breath!"

"Yes!"

Claire swung Flametongue in her hand.

With a crimson slash sweeping through the air, demon spirits appearing out of nothing were instantly destroyed.

Noticing the unusual situation, the guards in front of the gate manifested elemental waffen in their hands.

There were five of them. They looked like elite spirit knights.

(...As expected of the Empire's knights. They are well-trained.) "Charging at us with merely four people... Are they mad!?"

The apparent leader shouted, swinging a mighty hammer.

The shockwave was released radially, tearing up stone tiles on the street.

"O eternal magic ice, turn into a solid castle wall—Ice Wall!"

Rinslet instantly recited defensive spirit magic.

Rising from the ground, the wall of ice blocked the shockwave and debris completely.

Stepping hard on the ice wall in front of her, Ellis jumped into the air.

Raising Ray Hawk, she launched it at the main entrance.

"Fahrengart style of the spear, secret technique—Storm Strike!"

BOOM—

A whirlwind began to swirl, contracting at the spear tip.

The thrown Ray Hawk tore through the air as a flash of light, producing a spiral shockwave.

The Academy entrance was immediately contorted, then blown away in an instant.

The spear turned back into the shape of a demon bird spirit. Circling in the air, Simorgh returned to Ellis' arm.

Standing on the wall of ice, Ellis looked down at the Empire's knights with her blue hair fluttering in the wind.

Seeing her like that—

"...! Don't tell me it's Lady Ellis!?"

The apparent leader of these knights exclaimed in surprise.

"You are the Fahrengart's flagbearer, Inase-dono of the van Browa family, are you not?"

"Indeed. I am Inase van Browa, Captain of the Imperial Knights!"

Answering Ellis, the captain introduced herself openly. As the Fahrengart's flagbearer, she was supposed to be a knight swearing allegiance to Ellis.

However, Inase continued to keep her elemental waffe raised.

Presumably, she intended to remain loyal to her military position.

"Inase-dono, why would an honorable knight like you oppress students!?"

Ellis hated beating around the bush and true to her usual style, went straight to the point.

"I am a knight serving His Majesty the Emperor. I must complete the assigned mission."

The captain's answer left no room for mercy.

"So the Imperial Knights' methods include the use of demon spirits now?"

This time, it was Claire who shouted.

"...! It was the work of the Holy Kingdom. We have nothing to do with it."

"Did you say the Holy Kingdom!?"

(...As expected, the Holy Kingdom is involved, huh?)

Kamito commented in his thoughts. Naturally, he had thought that possibility highly likely to begin with. However, to summon demon spirits in great numbers was an act that would lead to disaster once the surrounding nations found out. Since such an act received military authorization, it meant that Ordesia's higher-ups currently had no power to resist the Holy Kingdom.

"You have admitted your guilt. If you stand by and allow it, you are complicit!"

"...!"

Hearing Rinslet's harsh and valid criticism, the captain became speechless.

"Inase-dono, you will only bring shame to the van Browa family name if you continue to let the Holy Kingdom do as it wishes."

"Even so, I shall never turn back from my oath of loyalty!"

Inase van Browa replied with determination.

"...! Even though I am in no place to say this, I must call you out on your

stubbornness!"

"Ellis, looks like you're actually quite flexible for a knight..."

"Captain, I have revised my opinion of you."

"Sh-Shut up..."

Ellis coughed and readied Ray Hawk.

"It is pointless to continue the discussion. Allow me to break through by force!"

"Break through by force? Do you intend to make enemies out of every spirit knight garrisoned here!?"

Alarms kept sounding all around. The militarized surveillance spirits flying in the sky aimed searchlights at Kamito's group.

Reinforcements were apparently arriving.

(...Fine, it's time to take a gamble.)

Kamito wiped away cold sweat while he reached into his chest pocket.

What he took out was a silver ring carved with High Ancient.

This was the Demon King's Ring for commanding the seventy-two spirits.

Although Kamito could only use this ring to control one spirit at a time— If he eschewed control and simply used it to liberate sealed spirits, there was no limit.

Kamito raised the ring and poured divine power into it.

"As the Demon King's successor, I hereby command. Awaken from your thousand-year-long slumber and flaunt your power to your hearts' content!"

The Ring glowed with intense light.

That blinding brightness frightened the Empire's knights.

Rumble, rumble rumble, rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble...!

In the next second, earthquake sounds kept appearing—

A great explosion happened in the Academy.

"W-What on earth is going on...!?"

The captain of the Imperial Knights sounded confused.

They turned their head to look back—

Only to see an unbelievable scene before their eyes.

A gigantic dragon spirit with as many as eight heads. A two-headed giant wielding a humongous wooden club. A great serpent shrouded in lightning. An enormous turtle with a weird mountain of rock on its back. A warrior clad in armor of steel— Every spirit was powerful enough to rival archdemon-class.

"—Five, no, six of them. More than I expected."

Restia's voice sounded in Kamito's mind.

What Kamito had liberated were the Demon King's minion spirits that the army had taken from the Demon King's Burial Chamber to safekeep. Although earlier Restia was uncertain whether primordial powerful spirits would heed Kamito's voice, now it was evidently a winning gamble.

Confronted with the sudden appearance of multiple archdemon-class spirits, the Imperial Knights panicked.

"Go wild all you like, servants of the Demon King!"

Kamito continued to pour divine power into the ring and shouted. The Demon King's Ring instantly shattered into fragments.

"Kamito, that was pretty good Demon King style. I award you six Demon King points."

"What kind of stupid points are those..."

Hearing Restia sounding a bit happy, Kamito could not help but retort.

"Anyway, now is the time to charge!"

With dual swords of white and black in his hands, Kamito charged into the knights.

Part 2

"...! What happened!?"

The current master of the headmistress' office stood up from her chair and shouted anxiously.

Taken over by the Imperial Knights, the headmistress' office of Areishia Spirit Academy had become the room of Alendora Eva Abyne, commander of the garrisoned force.

Among the aristocracy, the family of Duke Abyne was only second to House Fahrengart in prestige. In addition to her family background, Alendora's power as a spirit knight was also top-notch. Graduating from the Academy as the valedictorian, she currently held the position of Seventh of the Numbers. She was widely known as the user of a void spirit.

As someone of such stature, Alendora was stunned speechless after seeing the scene outside the window.

Large xenomorphic spirits had demolished the Academy's Sealed Library and came out of it.

They were on a rampage and currently attacking the Academy's school building.

No one had any grasp of the current situation.

Why would these spirits, supposed to have been sealed, suddenly awaken?

"...Damn it—"

With a contorted expression, Alendora smashed the headmistress' office's window.

"Fufu, why are you so agitated? Seeing as your are Seventh of the Numbers."

"...! You!"

She shouted angrily and turned her head back, only to see the Holy Kingdom's Cardinal standing in front of the door.

"I did not permit you to enter, Dame Millennia."

"I do not need your permission."

The young girl with an eye patch and dressed in holy vestments smiled nonchalantly.

"Do know that I was sent by his Majesty Emperor Arneus and granted full authority."

"...!"

Alendora gritted her teeth. She had always viewed with disdain this cardinal who did whatever she wanted, taking full advantage of the Emperor's decree, despite being among the Imperial Knights.

"What is the matter with this utter mess? Don't tell me this is another of your experiments?"

"No, incorrect. The Demon King is the one responsible—"

"What did you say?"

"Kazehaya Kamito has apparently arrived with his companions to recapture the Academy."

"Kazehaya Kamito—"

There was probably no one in Ordesia who did not know this name by now.

He was the one and only male elementalist in the world.

He was also the ace of Team Scarlet who had obtained victory in the Blade Dance.

At the same time, he was also the wanted criminal who had infiltrated the imperial capital to assist Second Princess Fianna's escape from prison.

"What a joke! How could a handful of people hope to take this military stronghold—"

"He did stop the strategic-class militarized spirit Leviathan in the Theocracy."

The cardinal girl laughed, somewhat amused.

"...!"

Indeed, he was not an opponent to be trifled with.

Currently, the Imperial Knights were in huge disarray— "I shall personally take to the front line. I suppose even higher-ranking knights might not be able to handle a Blade Dance victor."

With a flutter of her pure white cape, Alendora gallantly turned around and exited the office.

After taking a few glances at her as she left— Millennia Sanctus murmured softly.

"Unfortunately, you are no match for him either."

She spun around and looked up at the reddened sky outside the cracked window.

"Time to begin. Astral Shift."

In the next instant, countless cracks appeared in the air.

Part 3

"Guooooooooooooooooo!"

"Kishaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

Six spirits, minions of the Demon King, liberated from their thousand-year-long slumber, were running amok, looking as though they were showing off their strength. It looked like a battle between giant monsters.

Everything was unfolding as Kamito had hoped. The Imperial Knights were in utter confusion.

"On the other hand, I'm worrying whether the Academy might turn into rubble!"

While defeating the Imperial Knights standing in his way, Kamito commented.

"Since they have so many knights, I'm sure they'll find a way."

Running beside him, Claire replied.

"I-I guess..."

A total of six spirits, rivaling or even surpassing archdemon-class...

However, if they mobilized spirit knight battalions equipped with militarized spirits, they should manage to vanquish them.

"Send out the anti-spirit Kerberos! Deploy every Glasya-Labolas too!"

Kamito could hear what sounded like the voice of a commander knight. Although the knights deployed militarized spirits in a scattered manner, they soon lost against the Demon King's spirits because they could not muster an organized formation.

"The latest militarized spirits are getting taken out one after another!"

Saying that, Ellis turned pale.

"W-Will they demand compensation later on?"

"Sheesh, there's no use worrying about so much!"

"The princess will think of something!"

Kamito swung the Demon Slayer, chopping a large Glasya-Labolas in two.

In the center of the vast training ground, the pillar of light extended all the way to sky, forming a giant gate in midair. Three smaller pillars of light were sustaining that gate.

Under them were probably the ruins transported from the Spirit Forest.

The Imperial Knights did not seem aware that Kamito's team was targeting the ruins.

To destroy the ruins at three locations in one go, before they could bolster their defenses—That was the plan concocted by Claire.

"We're gonna split up three ways here."

"Yeah."

Kamito was in charge of the ruins deepest in the Academy, located in the direction of the large training ground. Ellis and Rinslet were responsible for the ruins towards the old cathedral in the northwest. As for the dormitory buildings in the northeast side— At this moment, Kamito released the Vorpall Sword.

The jet-black demon sword transformed into endless darkness that turned into the black-winged darkness spirit.

"—I look forward to working with you, Claire Rouge."

Restia landed next to Claire.

Indeed, Claire and Restia were the ones heading to the third set of ruins.

So long as he had Est in hand, Kamito was enough to fight by himself.

This was the conclusion reached after considering the balance between the three teams.

"Okay, hurry!"

"Yeah!"

Just as they were about to break into a run...

Crk, crk crk—

Suddenly, cracks appeared in the space around them.

"...W-What!?"

Claire jumped in surprise and looked around in a circle.

Next—

Out from the cracks in the air, demon spirits with strange appearances appeared one after another.

"...! Why are there demon spirits here!?"

Summoning great numbers of uncontrollable demon spirits within the Academy's premises.

Doing this would clearly add to the chaos.

Also, the quantity of demon spirits far surpassed what they had fought at the street barricade.

Even the spirits' ranks would be classified as mid-level or above.

Countless cracks swept by, occupying the entire Academy in one go.

"Could they be trying to release demon spirits all over the entire Academy town!?"

Ellis cried out in shock.

"...! We must hurry. Stop the ruins!"

Part 4

Crk, crk crk crk—!

With the sound of spatial distortion, many cracks appeared in the air.

"It is coming. Upperclassmen, ready your elemental waffen!"

Standing on the erected barricade, Freya shouted.

The Sylphid Knights' best students and the highest-achieving upperclassmen all deployed their respective elemental waffen. Rakka and Reishia also held their weapons, preparing to intercept the enemy.

"Surround each one with a squad of three or more! The injured should retreat to the back, don't overdo it!"

"Y-Yes!"

Roughly half of Areishia Spirit Academy's students were contracted with spirits above mid-level, but only about 30% were capable of deploying elemental waffen.

And only a handful had actually seen demon spirits before in actual combat.

Facing a large group of demon spirits, baring their teeth as they approached, the students' legs began to shake.

In front of these students, a knight dressed in a white overcoat stood in the front.

"—Fear not. I am the fortress that shall protect you all."

Velsaria Eva Fahrengart.

The Sylphid Knights' original captain, the one bearing the title of the strongest.

Facing the great number of demon spirits, standing there gallantly in the front

line, her figure brought courage to the students.

"Deploy elemental waffe—Juggernaut!"

With a flash of light, countless hovering cannons and castle wall shields appeared around her.

Looking back at the students exclaiming in surprise, Velsaria spoke.

"Take a few steps back. My elemental waffe might be a bit destructive—"

Boom! Boom boom boom boom boom!

Countless cannons fired all at once.

The air shook. The astounding supreme firepower swept the demon spirits away.

The round of suppressive fire brought fervent cheering from the students.

"Hmph, pretty good eh—"

Just then, looking down from a building rooftop, Muir smiled with amusement.

She jumped down nimbly from the roof and walked over to a barricade in the opposite direction.

"Muir will show off too."

Taking off a bracelet artifact, she recited the incantation to release the seal.

The cursed armament seal on the back of her hand glowed with ominous light.

Instantly, space was distorted and a gigantic beetle-like militarized spirit appeared.

This was Gargantua, a spirit specializing in building battlefield entrenchment.

Although not a combat-type spirit, its power far surpassed ordinary militarized spirits.

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh!

With the Jester's Vise removing its limiter, Gargantua swung its two massive arms to crush the demon spirits that were flitting about.

"Ahaha, crush them—Gargantua."

The horrific scene was making the Academy's teachers gasp.

"Muir will earn Onii-sama's praise."

Part 5

"Demon spirits? Accursed Holy Kingdom, what on earth are they thinking!?"

Seeing the atrocity before her eyes, Alendora Eva cried out with irritation.

Many demon spirits had appeared out from a dimensional gap to attack the Empire's knights indiscriminately.

The command system was in complete disarray. Even with her arriving the front line as the supreme commander, reorganizing the chaotic troops would be no easy task.

(At the very least, I need to get a grasp on what is happening—) In addition to the demon spirits, the spirits liberated from the Sealed Library were also on a rampage.

With her elemental waffe—Nether Void—in her hand, she stepped towards the training ground.

Even though the berserk spirits were quite powerful, as one of the Empire's prided Numbers, she was capable of defeating archdemon-class spirits singlehandedly.

—Ahead of her direction of advance...

Suddenly, a petite figure silently appeared.

"...?"

The new arrival was dressed in a gray overcoat with a hood.

On her face was a silver mask.

(A warrior priestess of the Holy Kingdom? No, not right...) Alendora stopped and carefully examined the opponent before her eyes.

"Is it you? Are you the one who liberated the spirits in the Sealed Library—"

"..."

The masked figure did not answer. She silently drew her sword from her chest.

It was a long sword with the color of blood, completely lacking in ornament.

"I see. You prefer military torture and interrogation. You get your wish."

Alendora whispered icily and poured divine power into the Nether Void.

"This is your unlucky day. To challenge the Empire's strongest, one of the Numbers—"

The surrounding air shook. A chunk of earth by her foot was carved away.

"—Empire's strongest, huh?"

Heh, the opponent seemed to laugh beneath her mask.

She sounded like a young girl. Presumably a student of the Academy—
Suddenly, in the next instant, the opponent disappeared from Alendora's sight.

"...!?"

She did not even get a chance to cry out.

The sword moved like purple lightning. Alendora Eva collapsed on the ground.

In defense of her honor, it is necessary to note—

Without the ability on the Numbers' level, she probably would not have even seen the flash of the sword.

Looking up into the reddened night sky, the masked girl whispered.

"Do they intend to bring about an Astral Shift here?"

Chapter 10 - Astral Shift

Part 1

Under the night sky, a glamorous dance of flaming slashes began.

Passing through the wide open training ground, Claire made her way towards the ruins in the northeast.

Alarm devices kept sounding while searchlights pursued her relentlessly.

However, spirit magic attacks aimed at Claire were blocked one after another by a pair of black wings.

"Darkness spirit, I never expected a day when you and I would fight alongside each other—"

"Fufu, are you able to keep up?"

"Don't look down on me, watch—!"

Claire's Flametongue destroyed countless demon spirits.

Faced with a swarm of demon spirits that had suddenly appeared, the Imperial Knights were in total chaos.

Was it because their commander was absent? Coordination between units was insufficient.

"Speaking of which, I still owe you a favor—"

Suddenly, Restia spoke.

"A favor?"

"Yes, on Ragna Ys. You saved me from those people from the Sacred Spirit

Knights."

Claire remembered. It was during the final round of the Blade Dance.

"You don't need to return it. I did for Kamito anyway."

"Now that won't do, Claire Rouge—"

Restia spread her jet-black wings.

"Howl, a storm of demon swords—Blade Storm!"

The launched jet-black feathers turned into a storm of darkness, shredding the demon spirits.

Witnessing the darkness spirit's astounding power, Claire could not help but gasp.

"...! Not bad, you might be a match for Ortlinde, I guess?"

"If you manage to draw out the hell cat's full power, well, perhaps it might be an even fight."

Restia chuckled.

"I have to admit, you are quite reliable when we're on the same side."

"You have improved too."

Although the two of them were always arguing, they were surprisingly in sync when working together.

Arriving at the plaza behind the student dormitories, they could see the base of the pillar of light.

It was a stone circle site formed from massive stone columns.



This used to be the ruins forming the gate within the Academy. Claire had used it before.

"The ruins!"

"Let's destroy it before they bring reinforcements."

"Yes, I know! Dance, the crimson flames summoning destruction—Hell Blaze!"

Claire recited the strongest flame-type spirit magic while running.

However—

"...W-What!?"

An incantation written in High Ancient, carved on the ruins, glowed and nullified the flames.

"...! Looks like ordinary attacks can't damage it."

The Holy Kingdom people had apparently cast multiple barriers.

...In that case, the only choice was to try using an elemental waffe to attack repeatedly to destroy it.

While slowly doing that, reinforcements were going to arrive sooner or later.

"Darkness spirit, do you have any way to destroy it?"

"...I could, but it will have to take some time. Of course, it would be a piece of cake if Kamito were to do it with my elemental waffe form."

"Okay, fine."

Claire shrugged and walked towards the ruins.

"...What is your plan now?"

"I will show you Scarlet's true power."

Claire poured divine power into Flametongue.

—Thou art the valorous valkyrie, the one who guideth the souls of warriors to the final battlefield.

—Thou art the destroyer, governing scorching flames, bringer of eternal destruction.

"Respond to my call, I hereby announce thy true name—Ortlinde!"

In that instant, Flametongue in Claire's hand transformed.

Countless deep-red blades, interlinked like a chain, burned with crimson flames.

—A blade chain forged from flames.

"Elemental waffe second form—Flame Blossom!"

With twintails fluttering up and down, Claire performed a blade dance like a princess maiden.

Innumerable sharp blades, imbued with the power of flames, ripped apart the barrier, destroying the ruins and rendering it unrecognizable.



Part 2

The team of Ellis and Rinslet was running northwest, heading for the old cathedral.

It was the building formerly used by the Sylphid Knights as their headquarters.

"Rinslet, please cover me!"

"Hmph, enjoy my spectacular marksmanship!"

Rinslet drew her bow elemental waffe and shot an arrow into the sky.

Like a rainstorm, countless arrows proceeded to descend.

The arrows of ice caused chain explosions as soon as they landed, immobilizing the legs of militarized spirits.

Seizing the opening when their movements were stopped, Ellis flew, enveloped in a gale.

"Ohhhhhhhh!"

Elemental waffe second form—Ray Hawk Ragna.

The cyclone generated from the sacred spear tip swept away all the Empire's knights standing in their way in one go.

It was truly a sublime blade dance.

"A splendid job, Captain."

"You too, Rinslet—"

Without turning her head back, Ellis replied to Rinslet who had swiftly caught up.

"The demon spirits turn out to be more troublesome than the Imperial Knights."

"Yes, they are endless."

The ruins firing the beam of light had apparently started summoning huge numbers of demon spirits.

"Let us wipe them out in one go, Rinslet."

"Understood."

Rinslet answered with excellent tacit understanding.

Ellis swung her spear, enveloped in a cyclone, while Rinslet fired an arrow that was like a storm.

" "Ice Storm!" "

This was a combination technique of elemental waffen.

The blizzard's sharp blades howled as they shredded the demon spirits.

Rinslet allowed her bow to return to Fenrir's form, then mounted his back.

"Captain, the ruins!"

"Yes—!"

Towards the circle of stone pillars, Ellis unleashed a full-powered strike.

However, it was easily deflected.

"...! There is a barrier, and quite a sturdy one too."

"The knights' reinforcements will come if we do not hurry."

"...!"

Ellis poured divine power into Ray Hawk Ragna and kept attacking.

"Rinslet—"

Just then. There was a voice from behind.

"...?"

Rinslet turned her back to see Fenrir tugging at her sleeve with his mouth.

"It is I, Rinslet—"

"Iseria-sama!?"

Rinslet widened her eyes in surprise.

"Listen to me. A serious incident has occurred in Astral Zero."

"Uh, excuse me, Iseria-sama, we are currently quite occupied—"

"It concerns you too."

The Iseria-possessed Fenrir spoke solemnly.

"W-What do you mean?"

"At your current coordinates in the human realm, a gigantic gate has been opened. At this rate, Astral Shift will be invoked."

"...Astral Shift?"

Hearing an unfamiliar term, Rinslet could not help but frown.

"Simply stated, it is a state when the human realm and Astral Zero overlap."

"That would be calamitous... What are you talking about!?"

Rinslet could not help but raise her voice.

Just then, cracks appeared in the air. A great number of demon spirits appeared next.

"...! We are surrounded!"

Ellis raised her spear and looked around.

There were roughly thirty demon spirits and they were clearly much bigger than the earlier ones.

"This is not good—"

Cold sweat flowed down their necks.

In the next instant, a flash of the sword swept through the darkness, slicing through space in all directions.

The demon spirits gathered near the ruins were annihilated in one go.

"...Eh?"

"W-What happened!?"

On the ruins, they saw—

A petite young girl with a gray hood, holding a long sword with the color of

blood.

"—Who is that?"

Ellis questioned. Next...

"All of you must leave now—"

The girl took off her hood and revealed her true identity to them.

" "—Y-You are!?" "

Ellis and Rinslet widened their eyes, rendered speechless.

Part 3

"Absolute Blade Arts, Third Form—Shadowmoon Waltz!

The flash of the sword traced out countless arcs, instantly tearing through the gathered demon spirits.

Holding the Demon Slayer glowing with silver-white light, Kamito charged the whole way through.

No one could block him. Never would the Imperial Knights imagine in their wildest dreams that they were meeting the renowned Strongest Blade Dancer in battle.

(—Say, the coordination between teams is really bad, considering they're military knights.) While sweeping away the Imperial Knights hurrying to the scene, Kamito thought to himself.

(...What the heck is their commander doing?) Breaking past the garden that was crowded with spirits, he approached the ruins that were producing the pillar of light.

"He is here. Surround him!"

In the darkness, a knight called out.

But it was too late. Kamito extinguished his sacred sword's glow then slipped through silently, using the back of his single-edged blade to knock out the Imperial Knights one after another.

Using a spectacular blade dance to draw attention first then using the Instructional School's assassination techniques to silently eliminate his enemies the next instant. His ever changing combat style made the knights dance on the palm of his hand.

The pile of super ancient ruins glowed with pale white light.

It looked like it could not be destroyed with ordinary power.

However—

"Est, let's go—"

"Yes, Kamito."

Kamito gripped the Demon Slayer tightly in both hands.

Next—

"—I shall not yield the ruins to you."

"...!?"

A girl dressed in holy vestments of pure white appeared out of darkness.

Hovering in the air, the girl looked down at Kamito with a smile.

"Millennia Sanctus...!"

Kamito readied his sacred sword.

"What is your goal in summoning demon spirits?"

"The demon spirits are merely a side effect."

Millennia shook her head.

"*Her* goal is to cause an Astral Shift."

"What did you say?"

...Astral Shift. An unfamiliar term.

"—To make the human realm and Astral Zero overlap."

"What...?"

"This is an experiment and a preview. To return this world to its original state.
And start over—"

—To rebuild the world from zero.

Those were Lurie Lizaldia's words.

To make the human realm and Astral Zero overlap in order to fulfill that goal?

"Do not get in the way, Kazehaya Kamito—"

Millennia chuckled and lifted the eye patch over her left eye.

Part 4

The demon spirits pouring out from the crack in space were getting more and more numerous.

Even though fortress spirit's bombardment did not stop, against overwhelming numbers, the barricade's barrier was nearing collapse.

"...!"

Clutching at her heart, Velsaria coughed blood.

The fortress spirit consumed vast amounts of divine power. Having lost the cursed armament seal on her heart, her body could no longer endure continuous operation for long periods of time.

"Velsaria-sama!"

"So hot...!"

Senior students of the Sylphid Knights helped support Velsaria who was about to collapse.

Her body felt scorching as though steam would come out any moment. In such a state, Velsaria was sustaining the fortress spirit through her extraordinary willpower.

"Velsaria-sama, this place won't hold any longer. Please retreat."

"...I cannot... re... treat..."

Velsaria panted while brushing away a knight's hand.

There was a large number of injured and immobile students here. If she were to withdraw the fortress spirit's defense line, it would be tantamount to leaving them to their fates.

"But...!"

"...! Wait, no way, how could this be possible!?"

Opposite to the barricade, Muir's voice was almost a scream.

Velsaria turned her head to look.

...Only to see a despairing scene.

Out from an extra large crack in space—

An especially gigantic demon spirit was crawling out.

It was a mandible spirit with no limbs and no lips, just countless teeth.

Cracking open, it seemed to be laughing— In the next instant, it crushed Muir's militarized spirit, Gargantua, in its teeth in one go.

"...! No way, that's a large militarized spirit that can build strongholds!?"

Muir widened her ice-blue eyes.

The defense line was instantly broken. Demon spirits swarmed into the barrier.

"Front line units, retreat while counterattacking. Withdraw to behind the Fortress!"

Velsaria swiftly gave orders.

She deployed all cannons to fire at once.

Although a large group of enemies were instantly annihilated, the demon spirits kept appearing like smoke.

Her fortress spirit was not going to last long.

What made things worse was—

"N-No way...?"

Muir's voice was convulsing.

A large demon spirit emerged from a crack, followed by the same type of demon spirit.

One, two, three, four, five...

The large demon spirits ravaged the barricade while devouring the

surrounding demon spirits.

"...! Damn it—!"

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Velsaria's main cannon destroyed one of the large spirits.

However, that was the limit.

"Cough... Huff..."

With a forceful gasp, Velsaria collapsed right there on the ground.

The core of the defense, the fortress spirit, proceeded to collapse, turning into particles of light then disappearing.

"...I am sorry, Ellis—"

The collapsed Velsaria drew the sword at her waist. It was a ceremonial sword rather than an elemental waffe. However, if one were to pour divine power into the blade, it ought to be able to slay small demon spirits— "Velsaria-sama, please withdraw!"

"Protect the captain!"

The senior students in the Sylphid Knights formed a circle formation, stepping forward to protect her.

"Y... ou..."

"Please escape. We will do everything we can to buy time."

"...This body of mine should have died a long time ago. I shall fight here to the very end."

"Velsaria-sama..."

As though mocking them, the large demon spirits made bizarre noises while approaching— In the next instant, the approaching large demon spirit was crushed with a splat.

"...Wh... at...!?"

A great steel sword with metallic luster had pierced the demon spirit's head in one strike.

Carved on the great sword's hilt was a dragon head design.

"—Looks like I made it in time."

A girl descended to the ground, effortlessly pulling out the great sword embedded in the ground.

"You are..."

"Leonora Lancaster, Captain of the Knights of the Dragon Emperor."

The girl in military uniform introduced herself.

"Upon the orders of the Dragon King, I come to provide assistance."

She casually swung the great sword in her hand and chopped down another demon spirit.

Just then, dragon riders riding flying dragons landed one after another.

Raising the Dragon Slayer in one hand, Leonora turned the blade.

"The dragons of Dracunia obtain strength when on the verge of death—"

Unable to conceal a dragon's instincts, her eyes were filled with the joy of combat.

"—Feast your eyes upon the power of an awakened dragon."

Chapter 11 - Angel of the Otherworld

Part 1

"...Ah, ooh, ahhhhh... Ahhhhhhhhhh!"

The darkness dripping out from Millennia Sanctus' left eye was spreading out on the ground.

This dense darkness was able to corrupt Elemental Lords and render them insane— Millennia writhed in pain, tearing at her left eye.

The spilled darkness stained her pure white vestments, gradually swallowing her.

"...! What the heck are you doing—"

Faced with the girl who was being devoured by the darkness that she herself was generating, Kamito had no idea what to do.

...Was she unable to control the Otherworldly Darkness?

No. No way in hell—

This cardinal had controlled the Otherworldly Darkness many times before.

"Kamito, be careful."

Gripped in his right hand, Est spoke.

"—There is something inside."

"...What!?"

"Fufuf, so you sensed it, my little sister—"

With half her body swallowed by Otherworldly Darkness, Millennia jeered.

"The Otherworldly Darkness within me is a catalyst for opening a gate—"

"Did you say gate?"

"To summon... The Otherworld..."

The restless Otherworldly Darkness completely swallowed Cardinal Millennia.

Turned into a hovering black sphere in the air, it started vibrating with an earsplitting sound.

"What is going on...?"

"Kamito, hurry, destroy it—"

"...! Got it!"

Hearing Est's urgent voice, Kamito instantly reacted.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Seventh Form—Biting Dragon!"

He unleashed all the divine power gathered in his feet in one go and flew to the air to execute an anti-air interception Absolute Blade Art.

The glow of divine power left a trail of light in the night, dashing through the air like a long dragon.

However—

Wwwwwn!

An invisible barrier appeared around the sphere, deflecting the silver-white blade.

(...What!?)

Almost like bouncing away, Kamito was sent flying to crash into the ground.

Kamito landed.

(...What the heck was that just now!?)

Was it a wall generated by a barrier, or spirit magic— "...! I can't believe it deflected the Demon Slayer...?"

Kamito looked up and stared into space.

Just then, a crack suddenly appeared in the center of the dark sphere that had swallowed Millennia— In the next instant, *the sphere was ripped apart from within.*

Spurting out like blood, Otherworldly Darkness fell all at once, dyeing the ruins black.

Next, two glowing arms emerged from the center of the torn open sphere.

"...!?"

Kamito instantly felt his hairs stand on end with goosebumps.

He felt it instinctively.

This was something that did not belong in this world— The dark sphere was shredded then *it* appeared in this world.

An effigy of a warrior, three times a human's height, with golden glowing wings.

The beautiful face formed from pure white stone looked both masculine and feminine.

Glowing with bright light, the jewel-like eyes looked down coldly at the earth.

(...A spirit?)

Muttering in his thoughts, Kamito decided no and shook his head.

(...No. I've seen something similar to it before—) At the Forest of Ice Blossoms in Laurenfrost, merged with the dominating ice spirit Zirnitra.

The thing possessing Rinslet's younger sister Judia Laurenfrost— Inside the Otherworldly Darkness surging in the Elemental Lord's shrine, Kamito had seen it.

"...An angel."

Cold sweat slowly dripped down the back of his hand.

The Demon Slayer in his hand likewise shook slightly.

Millennia Sanctus had said that she was the gate for summoning it.

To summon this visitor from the Otherworld, neither the human realm nor

Astral Zero— The angel slowly descended to the ground and manifested a single-edged sword in its hand.

The sword's length was twice that of the Demon Slayer.

Facing off against it, Kamito readied the Demnon Slayer and poured divine power into his sword.

"Kamito—"

Just then, the glowing silver-white sword spoke.

"Yes, I know. It's—"

"I was created for the purpose of destroying them."

"Huh?"

Hearing what Est said, Kamito asked in return.

"Est, you know that thing?"

"Yes. The primordial memories sleeping inside me told me. I am—No, the original purpose of every spirit weapon created in this world was to destroy such angels."

Held in his hand, Est was exuding an astounding amount of hostility from her blade.

It was like a beast facing a natural enemy with an unforgivable grudge—
"Spirit weapons huh—"

That term had been uttered by Est herself a number of times before.

They were powerful weapons used to annihilate spirits during the Spirit War. Like her, Ortlinde the Scarlet Valkyrie was also a spirit weapon.

If their original purpose was to fight angels from the Otherworld— (...Then who was it that created them?)

As though to interrupt Kamito's thoughts—

Kiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiin—

The angel made a sound in a strange pitch.

"—Kamito, it is coming."

The angel acted.

It slid over like gliding on the ground. In the next instant, it suddenly disappeared from sight.

"...!"

Immense mass, moving with subsonic momentum—

In response, Kamito used the Demon Slayer to block.

Mustering his entire body's divine power, he strained his hardest to resist the earth-shattering impact.

"Kamito, I need even more divine power—Or else we will be overwhelmed."

"...! I'm already doing my best!"

Even though he had drawn upon such a massive amount of divine power in one breath, Kamito was still pushed back.

With his feet scraping against the ground, Kamito was pushed against a building in the training ground.

"Cough... Huff—!"

His breathing stopped momentarily, Kamito spat out blood.

Without Est's Protection of Steel, he might have been crushed to death.

In front of his eyes was an eerie beautiful face carved from pure white stone.

Without any expression, it kept muttering strange notes the whole time.

(...! What is with this brute strength... Ah...!) Compared to the graceful looking appearance, its strength far surpassed even that of large militarized spirits.

"Combat memory domain connection established. Analysis complete—Kamito, this is Dunamis."

"What? That's this thing's name?"

"No, a classification to distinguish type. The ones seen before were reconnaissance type, but this one is—"

Just then, the angel's shoulders split open to sprout multiple arms wielding

swords of light.

"A pure combat type—"

"...! Ohhhhhhhh!"

Kamito shouted. Kicking against the wall in the training ground with one put, he allowed the gathered divine power to explode.

"Absolute Blade Arts, Seventh Form—Biting Dragon Revised!"

The power of this anti-air Absolute Blade Art was supposed to be directed vertically, but he unleashed it towards the front.

Boom—

With a sound like a cannonball, the wall was instantly blown away. The surging divine power dug up a huge hole in the ground.

The contact point of the blade erupted with violent sparks. The angel's gigantic body was pushed back for an instant.

In that instant, Kamito deflected an incoming blade and swiftly turned around. Lowering his stance, he lunged at the enemy's chest.

"Absolute Blade Arts, First Form—"

Just then, the angel's two wings resonated together to produce strange noise.

Instantly, something resembling tiny glowing runes kept appearing, deploying around the angel.

(...Defense magic!? It's not gonna work!)

Unfazed, Kamito unleashed his sword move.

"—Purple Lightning, Flare!"

The sword traveling with godlike speed at pointblank range erupted with lightning as it struck the angel squarely in belly.

However, the sacred sword's tip, concentrated with divine power, was blocked by the barrier of glowing runes.

(...What!?)

Those runes, swiftly rotating around the angel, seemed to resemble High

Ancient a little.

(...! What, so it isn't spirit magic!?)

"Anti-field—this rejection barrier has nullified my steel attribute *on a conceptual level*."

"What the heck!?"

"Not spirit magic. A rewriting of rules. A phenomenon not of this world—"

A halo appeared on the angel's head.

Riiiiiiiiiiiiiii—

Making a howl resembling supersonic waves, it blew Kamito away.

"Guh—"

Kamito somersaulted while regaining balance then immediately readied his sword.

"...Did you say your steel attribute has been nullified? What do you mean?"

"Reconnecting to combat memory domain—Begin analysis."

While Est said that, words of High Ancient appeared on her blade and flowed swiftly.

"Est? What the heck are you doing—"

"Due to contact with natural enemy, part of the spirit weapon's memory domain has been released. Kamito, I will analyze the barrier. Until that is done, please buy time for now."

He heard Est's calm voice in his mind.

"If I buy time, you'll have a way to deal with that cheating barrier?"

"Yes, Kamito. Upon the name of Terminus Est—"

The Demon Slayer held in his hands glowed with silver-white light.

In front of the enemy, Est's original combat mode seemed to be awakening.

"...I got it. I'm counting on you, Est."

While creating distance to face off, Kamito cautiously bided his time.

Although the subsonic movement was a threat, it was not impossible to evade as long as he discerned the activation time of the movement.

(—Ren Ashbell isn't gonna lose in contest of speed.) The angel spread its wings of light and raised one hand to the sky.

Instantly, runes of light turned into countless rings, capturing several demon spirits floating in the air.

(...What the heck is going on this time?)

With the Demon Slayer readied, Kamito remained alert.

As though issuing an order, the angel swung a giant sword forcefully down.

In the next instant, a demon spirit roared and charged at Kamito.

The demon spirit opened their jaws to reveal terrifying teeth and flew at him like a cannonball.

(...Don't tell me it can take control of demon spirits!?) It was different from how elementalists employed spirits.

It was almost like the spirit's existence itself was rewritten— Kamito instantly reacted and swung his sword— "Absolute Blade Arts, Third Form—"

"Kamito, no!"

Est's voice rang out. In the nick of time, Kamito chose evasion instead.

Next, the demon spirit exploded.

"...!"

The violent explosion continued to ring in his ears. Kamito rolled on the ground, dodging the heat wave.

If he had struck the demon spirit directly instead of evading, he would have been blown to bits.

"Spirits can become suicide bombers?"

"Yes. It overwrote the demon spirit's nature to launch a suicide attack."

"It can even do that!?"

While dodging the demon spirits that kept flying over to attack, Kamito

muttered to himself.

The angel raised its hand again, seizing control of the demon spirits that kept flowing through the crack in space.

"Damn this—"

Heat waves from the explosions were scorching Kamito's skin.

It was like using the massive divine power possessed by spirits, turning it into the energy for an explosion.

For example, this would be like nonstop creation of small auto-tracking spirit detonations.

Using an elemental waffe specialized for close quarters combat against them would be really poor compatibility.

(...It's not like I can summon Restia back, right?) If he called Restia back now, Claire would have to fight alone.

Aiming at Kamito who had evaded the bombardment, the angel shot a new demon spirit projectile.

(...Infinite ammo!?)

He looked up at the reddened sky and grumbled in his thoughts. Just then...

Suddenly, Kamito noticed a change in the surrounding scenery.

"...Two moons?"

Hanging in the sky over the Academy was Astral Zero's moon.

Part 2

"...W-What is going on!?"

In front of the collapsed ruins, Claire looked around in astonishment.

Like a mist of blood, the demon realm's miasma was hanging all around, greatly decreasing visibility.

...The familiar environment of the Academy was practically a different scene.

"—Astral Shift has happened."

Restia spoke softly and calmly.

"...Astral Shift?"

Even an honors student like Claire had never heard of the term.

"It's a phenomenon when the human realm and Astral Zero temporarily overlap. Although it occasionally happens inside the Spirit Forest, I have never seen one on such a large scale."

"W-What is that..."

Claire spoke with an unsettled look.

"Isn't the point of creating the gate is to summon demon spirits?"

While Claire was in confusion, a great number of demon spirits were still pouring through. The crack slicing through the air became even larger. Large demon spirits started to show up.

"I clearly destroyed the ruins here—"

"Looks like the Astral Shift is limited to the Academy's premises. Had these ruins not been destroyed, perhaps the entire Academy town would have been superimposed with the demon realm."

"Then that means there must be a set of ruins yet to be destroyed."

"Yes—"

Restia's sunset-colored eyes stared into the distance.

Claire noticed a measure of worry in those eyes.

(The darkness spirit is worried about Kamito.) She must want to hurry over to Kamito's side.

Claire gripped Flametongue tightly.

"Go, darkness spirit—"

"Huh?"

"Leave this place for Scarlet and me to handle. You go back to Kamito's side —"

"Claire Rouge..."

Restia thought for a while—

"Unacceptable. I promised Kamito to protect you."

She soon shook her head.

"After Scarlet's true name release, your divine power must be depleted."

"Uh..."

Claire bit her lip.

She was right, Claire had definitely consumed quite a lot of her energy.

But even so—

"I will protect myself. After all, I am Kamito's teammate."

"..."

Hearing such words from Claire— Restia shrugged and sighed lightly.

"...Fine. Claire Rouge, I have revised my opinion of you a bit."

Saying that, she plucked a few feathers from her black wings and handed them to Claire.

"...These are?"

"Talismans of Darkness. They will surely protect you."

The feathers of darkness spirit Restia were commonly known as Blessings of Darkness.

They were supreme talismans that could not be bought from any shop no matter how much one desired them. In the past, there was even one time when a major nation's royal family started a war because of them. Legendary artifacts indeed.

However, Claire had no idea the priceless value of the gift.

"...Th-Thank you."

She obediently accepted them.

"—I entrust Kamito to you."

"Of course—"

Restia nodded then spread her jet-black wings and flew into the night sky.

Part 3

Two moons, red and white, were hanging in the sky over the Academy.

Looking at Astral Zero's moon, Kamito was rooted to the spot in astonishment.

"What's happening, Est?"

Even though he asked his partner, she did not reply.

She was evidently focusing her full attention to analyzing the Dunamis angel.

(—Millennia said it was to make the human realm and Astral Zero overlap.)
Astral Shift referred to such a phenomenon?

(What's the purpose of doing that...?)

But wait, the enemy in front of him was more important right now.

The Dumanis kept rewriting the demon spirits flowing out of the gate to become spirit detonations.

Perhaps due to the Astral Shift's effect, the surroundings were gradually corrupted by the demon realm— The demon spirits serving as raw materials became much larger than before.

...Kamito dared not imagine their firepower.

The angel's wings glowed with blistering light.

—At the same time, it swung down its massive sword like an executioner.

Seven spirit detonations formed from large demon spirits instantly rushed at Kamito in a charging attack.

Since their firepower had increased, Kamito concluded that dodging them by paper-thin margins like earlier would not work.

He had no method of handling suicide bombs coming from seven different

directions at the same time.

(What can I do? Should I use steel magic to create daggers out of divine power and pierce all seven at the same time?) No good. The demon spirits were all mid-level or above.

Using spirit magic to create improvised weapons would not be enough to cause damage, probably.

(I have to take a gamble and use Purple Lightning's godlike speed to race against the explosions—) Kamito concentrated a great amount of divine power at his feet.

Failure meant getting blown to bits.

"Absolute Blade Arts, First Form—"

"O black lightning, even capable of incinerating souls to oblivion—Hell Blast!"
—A second just before Kamito released his divine power...

Raging jet-black lightning pierced the seven large demon spirits.

BOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Deafening explosions. A terrifying chain reaction took place. Heat from the scorching flames made Kamito's skin hurt.

"...!?"

While shielding his eyes from the flying sparks, Kamito looked up.

Only to see amid the blazing flames that seemed to incinerate the night sky—
Flapping her jet-black wings, the darkness spirit slowly descended.

"Restia!?"

"Fufu, looks like you are in quite a tough battle, Kamito—"

The spirit seal on his left hand glowed especially brightly.

Landing on the ground, Restia raised her hand lightly and extinguished the blazing flames.

"Restia, why—"

"The ruins over there have been destroyed by Claire Rouge."

Restia replied to the surprised Kamito who was inquiring about what had happened.

"Claire is fine, right?"

"I have her some feathers to serve as talismans. She should be able to endure until she converges with her companions."

Restia chuckled.

"You go back to Kamito's side—That was what she said. What an adorable child."

"Really—"

Claire's feelings warmed Kamito's heart.

"If you're worried about little miss hell cat, hurry up and defeat that thing."

"Yeah, you're right—"

Kamito nodded boldly and took Restia's hand immediately.

"Come, ruler of the night. O merciless goddess of darkness— Thou art the sword of wisdom, the piercer of truth—!"

He chanted the words of release for an elemental waffe.

—The Demon Slayer and the Vorpal Sword.

Wielding the ultimate sacred and demon swords, Kamito faced the Dunamis angel again.

"—Sorry for making you wait. I am Ren Ashbell, the Strongest Blade Dancer."

The angel's wings of light flashed. That sculpture-like beautiful face still showed no expression— But it looked confused, apparently.

"Kamito, analysis of concept barrier is complete—"

Words of High Ancient appeared on Est's blade.

"—There is nothing which the ultimate steel cannot cut."

"Well done, Est."

"Yes, Kamito."

An image of Est puffing out her chest with pride appeared in his mind.

"Let's go, you two—"

"Yes." "I am your sword, your wish is my command—"

The two spirit swords replied at the same time.

Despite bickering frequently, the two of them were very in sync when taking action.

The Dunamis raised its great sword. Emitting strange noise, it created bombs out of demon spirits.

"—Stop thinking you'll win by repeating the same old move!"

Kamito took a deep breath and kicked the ground hard.

While shouting, he aimed at the demon spirits raining down on him.

"O darkness, go and pierce—Vorpall Blast!"

Using Ren Ashbell's signature move, he annihilated them in one strike.

Between the flames and heat waves, Kamito enveloped himself in divine power and charged in one go.

"Absolute Blade Arts, First Form—Purple Lightning Revised!"

Drawing the Demon Slayer, he released divine power.

Instantly, Kamito closed in on his target, stabbing the silver-white sword into armor that resembled a breastplate.

Runes of light appeared in front of the sword's tip to form a barrier, but— At the same time, runes of light likewise appeared on the Demon Slayer and neutralized the generated barrier.

The silver-white blade pierced the breastplate, shattering that marble-like body.

(The attack worked!)

Kamito cheered in his thoughts. Immediately...

Aiming at the angel's massive stumbling body, he unleashed a series of sword moves in continuous succession— "Absolute Blade Arts, Third Form—

Shadowmoon Waltz!" "Absolute Blade Arts, Sixth Form—Crushing Fang!"
"Absolute Blade Arts, Fourth Form—Blaze Slash!" "Absolute Blade Arts,
Introductory Form—True Bursting Cherry Blossom Flurry!" "Absolute Blade
Arts, Third Form, Alpha Variant—Shadowmoon Waltz, Major Double Turn!"
"Absolute Blade Arts, Seventh Form—Biting Dragon Double Blossom!"

Every strike of the Absolute Blade Arts, each capable of a one-hit kill,
connected— The armor covering the angel began to flake off and crumble.

Then—

"Absolute Blade Arts, Second Form—Obverse Meteor, Peerless Zetsura!"

A dual-wielding technique using his entire body, he sent the Dunamis' massive
body flying.

Crash!

Smashing against the ruins, the angel lost an arm that snapped off tragically.

<—La—La...>

The angel seemed unable to comprehend the phenomenon before its eyes.

Expressionlessly, it looked down at its damaged part.

"...What now? First time getting hurt?"

Kamito grinned savagely.

He could feel a violent power that was sleeping inside him gradually awaken.

The divine power's glow covering his entire body had turned black in color.

After he had exhausted his own divine power, Ren Ashdoll's power was
starting to surge.

Just then, the angel's massive body slowly stood up.

It swung its sword to point straight up at the sky, rewriting the demon spirits
that were flying to and fro.

"...Ha, don't you remember anything at all—"

Kamito used the Vorpall Sword to summon jet-black demon lightning.
However— Instead of charging at Kamito, the demon spirits gathered around

the injured angel.

"What the...?"

As soon as the strangely shaped cluster of demon spirits touched the angel's armor— They were absorbed like melted ice.

The angel's damaged body began to gradually regenerate—or rather, reconstruct itself.

"...What the heck, are you kidding me?"

Kamito groaned.

"—It is rewriting the demon spirit's structure to meld with itself."

"Where does it get so many cheating skills from..."

Hearing Est's voice in his mind, Kamito could not help but exclaim in despair.

The angel's entire body was covered by armor resembling a hard shell.

(...Come to think of it, the angel at Laurenfrost also merged with spirits and ice dragons.) Just then, Kamito recalled that incident.

It was like they had the authority to freely write this world's existence.

That was practically...

"...Damn it. Looks like it's a waste of effort I don't finish it off in one attack."

Kamito shrugged and laughed.

...Confronted with such an absurd being, his only choice was to laugh.

(—Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance, I guess?)

Kamito regulated his breathing while readying his two swords in a stance.

The most destructive of the Absolute Blade Arts, meant to be used against large spirits.

If even this move failed to work—

"Then we're dead meat—"

Kamito muttered to himself sardonically. Just then— "—Decisiveness is a virtue, but there is only a fine line dividing it from recklessness, lad."

A voice spoke to him from across the sea of fire.

"...!?"

Kamito looked back, only to see a petite girl in a gray overcoat appear before him.

Carrying an ominous demon sword with the color of blood, the girl was making her way towards him.

Under the hood, he could catch glimpses of gray eyes, glimmering faintly in the darkness.

"...! You—"

Speechless, Kamito widened his eyes.

The girl took off her hood, her gray hair instantly fluttering in the wind.

"Greyworth!"

Kamito's shout echoed all around.

Yes, she was none other than—

The Greyworth who had gone missing after falling down the canyon in Dracunia.

Having regained her youth as well as her peak capabilities, she had become an assassin for the Holy Kingdom— "Greyworth, I knew it, you're still alive!"

"Of course. How could the Witch be dead?"

Saying that, the youthful Greyworth grinned.

Seeing that especially nostalgic expression, Kamito understood.

"...You've regained your memory?"

"—Yes. I remember everything. Everything."

Greyworth nodded and looked towards the angel that kept absorbing demon spirits.

"Twenty-four years ago, I saw it too."

"Twenty-four years ago—"

It was the year when Greyworth Ciel Mais had won the Blade Dance.

"However, let us leave that story for later. We must end this before it finishes reconstructing itself."

"Yeah, you're right—"

The Dunamis angel's armor was bulging. Its weight was enough to crush the ground underfoot.

In addition to the demon spirits, it was even starting to absorb the ruins sustaining the gate.

Greyworth drew a blood-colored demon sword—the elemental waffe Vlad Dracul.

Likewise, Kamito readied his two swords and stood beside her.

Ren Ashbell, the Strongest Blade Dancer, and the Dusk Witch— "—Can you keep up with me, lad?"

"I was gonna ask you the same thing. By the way, didn't I win that blade dance at Dracunia?"

"I had lost my memory then. Doesn't count."

"...You're going with that excuse? Whatever. I'd win no matter how many times we tried again."

"Oh? You've upgraded your mouth, the boy who used to work as a maid in my mansion."

"...Do me a favor and lose your memory again."

The two bickered while amplifying their divine power.

"—End the battle in one strike. It'll be bad if Ren Ashdoll's power continues to eat away at me."

"My intention all along—"

Both of them kicked the ground at the same time.

Like a flash of purple lightning, they instantly rushed to to the gigantic Dunamis angel to engage in close quarters combat.

The angel raised four arms and entered a defensive stance.

"—Can you break them, Greyworth?"

"Hmph, who do you think you're talking to?"

The angel roared. Against the slashing attacks that were like a storm— With fluid motions to evade, Greyworth delivered heavy blows aimed at the joints.

"Absolute Blade Dance, Alternate Form—Ice Storm Rakshasa!"

A vine of ice shot out from the demon sword's blade to entangle the angel's entire body.

This was an Absolute Blade Art unique to the Witch, a combination of spirit magic and sword technique.

The angel's movements stopped.



—However, runes of light immediately appeared, taking only an instant to erase the magical ice that rivaled Rinslet's Ice Nein.

"Oh?"

"Instant disintegration of constitutional elements. All magical effects will be neutralized."

Est explained in Kamito's mind.

"Suits me just fine. Let's see how many times you can neutralize!"

Enveloped in demon lightning, the Vorpall Sword smashed the angel's enlarged legs. Greyworth's demon sword deflected a great sword that was approaching Kamito, then spun around to amputate that arm.

Flash after flash of swords tore through the night— These movements of swords were almost like a blade dance offered to spirits.

(So this is the Dusk Witch in her prime, huh—)

Kamito clicked his tongue mentally. He was lucky to have won the duel at Dracunia.

"Absolute Blade Dance, Flash Form—Death Butterfly Flash Dance!"

Dodging a storm of violent attacks, Greyworth launched a counterattack. Even though the angel tried to deploy a rune barrier, Est erased it.

Two arms were chopped off. An opening appeared in the enemy's secure defense. In that very instant...

There was no need to signal.

As though they had agreed beforehand...

The two of them unleashed the ultimate Absolute Blade Art at the same time.

" "Absolute Blade Arts, Destructive Form—Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance, Hundred Combination Ashura!" "

Innumerable flashes of the sword criss-crossed and overlapped, turning into a rain of light, flooding the entire space.

It was an ultimate sword technique that originally existed in theory only.

With the Demon King and the Witch performing the strongest Double Absolute Blade Arts together— —The Dunamis angel was pulverized.

Epilogue

Part 1

Claire was running across the training ground that was covered by strange mist.

"Meow..."

At her feet, Scarlet called out feebly.

Simply breaking out of the demon spirit encirclement had exhausted her divine power, to the point where she could not even muster the energy to maintain her elemental waffe. Without the protection of Restia's talismans, she definitely could not have escaped to here.

"...Say, where is this?"

Inside the demon realm's mist that was hanging around, Claire looked at her surroundings apprehensively. The Academy's training ground, supposed to be a familiar place to her, currently looked like another place.

"Kamito..."

She could not help but recite his name. Just then...

"Claire, are you there!?"

Rinslet's familiar voice called out.

"Rinslet? I-I'm here!"

As soon as she called out, Rinslet and Ellis soon appeared, riding Fenfir's back. Also, for some reason, they were followed by several Imperial Knights.

"I am glad you are safe and sound. Looks like the ruins here have been destroyed successfully."

"...Yes. What about you?"

"Yes. But we were not the ones who destroyed the ruins."

Ellis seemed a bit vague with her words.

"...?"

"Say, did something happen? Why is Astral Zero's moon here?"

The Imperial Knights asked in confusion.

Confronted with the anomalous surge of demon spirits, they looked like they had no time to bother with the student uprising.

"I am not sure either—"

Claire shook her head in response. Just then...

"Ah, the pillar of light vanished!"

Rinslet pointed at the sky and cried out.

The largest pillar of light from the center of the Academy had disappeared without a trace.

"Looks like Kamito succeeded in destroying the ruins."

"Then the demon spirits will stop appearing?"

"Yes, so long as the gate is shut—"

Claire answered, prompting the Imperial Knights to exhale in relief.

Looking up at the sky, she saw Astral Zero's moon grow dim, about to vanish.

Suddenly, she saw countless silhouettes flying over from the sky above the Academy.

"More demon spirits?"

"No, they are reinforcements from Dracunia!"

Riding flying dragons, the knights entered the Academy one after another.

With the Numbers knight serving as the supreme commander missing and the

majority of the Imperial Knights unwilling to fight anymore, recapturing the Academy was just a matter of time.

"...Anyway, mission accomplished, I guess."

Claire murmured to herself.

Part 2

The demon realm's mist gradually dissipated.

After executing the Absolute Blade Art, Kamito instantly lied down face up on the ground.

After the ruins were destroyed and stopped operating, the Astral Shift seemed to have stopped.

The terrifying numbers of demon spirits also gradually vanished.

The fragmented remains of the Dunamis angel turned into runes of light and disappeared into thin air.

"...Looks like we made it."

Kamito muttered in exhaustion.

Astral Zero's moon had disappeared. A weak glow leaked from between the clouds.

The sun was starting to rise.

"...Greyworth, what have you been doing until now?"

Kamito asked Greyworth who was standing by his side.

Hearing that, she tossed her gray hair.

"Working out how to take back the Academy from those morons. I can't tolerate people messing around in my backyard."

She smiled wryly and replied.

"Doing things alone is a bit reckless, but you guys showed up in time."

"Just be honest. You wanted to save the students, right?"

"...My unworthy disciple. So you've learned to talk back, huh?"

With an offended look on her face, she frowned.

Even her unlikeable attitude now seemed a little cute when performed by that adorable young girl's appearance.

"Say, how did an elementalist like you get brainwashed?"

Kamito asked just then.

...It was a question he had wondered for a long time now.

He found it hard to imagine the Dusk Witch falling so easily to become the enemy's tool.

"Brainwashing, huh? I wish that was what had happened."

"...?"

Kamito raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"What constrains my soul is the covenant from twenty-four years ago."

Greyworth replied.

"Covenant?"

"Yes, the covenant I entered with Holy Lord Alexandros."

"...!?"

Hearing that name from her lips—

Kamito could not help but gasp.

"...Very well, since I promised, I shall tell you."

With a serious look on her face, Greyworth began.

"—About what I know from the Elemental Lord's shrine twenty-four years ago."

Afterword

—To me, the Academy is a very precious place.

Hello everyone, this is Shimizu. Thank you for your patience.

I hereby present to you all, Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance Volume 18, *Retaking the Imperial Capital*.

The Holy Kingdom's guest general, Lurie, used a spirit detonation to cause the Demon King's Tomb to collapse. Caught in the explosion, Kamito was rescued by the unidentified merchant Safian whom Kamito had met in the Demon King City. He had revealed his true identity to Kamito and told him the truth of the Demon King's Coffin. With the thousand-year-old seal released, what had awakened was—

This was how the first half of Volume 18 ended the Demon King City arc of Volume 17. The second half is about the story after returning to the Theocracy. With the appearance of the one who doesn't wear panties and the one who had gone missing, it feels like the plot is entering a climax... Kamito's group, in exile from Ordesia since Volume 14, finally returns to Areishia Spirit Academy after traveling to various places including Dracunia, the Theocracy and the Demon King City. Will Kamito and the noble young ladies of Team Scarlet ever return to the ordinary daily life they used to live?

Next comes acknowledgments. Shimesaba Kohata-sensei, who has drawn beautiful illustrations since Volume 17, thank you very much. Restia-sama on the cover is too beautiful... The princess maiden of water version of Rinslet in the color illustrations is also amazing. As for the princess maiden of fire outfits worn by Rubia and Ren Ashbell, the design is different because different Elemental Lords have different preferences. *As a side note, the princess maiden of wind ritual attire is so erotic that Ellis does not wish to wear it.

Editor-sensei, sorry for causing you all kinds of trouble again. I will do my very best to produce the most awesome ending. Please continue to support me!

And so, we finally reach Volume 19 next time. Let us meet again with *The Darkness Elemental Lord*. At the same time, look forward to more news about the audio drama!

Shimizu Yuu, April 2018

Illustrator's Afterword

イラストレーター あとがき、

ごきげんよう、メ鯨コハダです。
さて、盛り上がって参りました！の18巻、
前巻からイラストを担当させて頂いて今回三冊目
18巻も初めて描くキャラが多く
キャラの把握のために
既刊を何度も読み返しておりました。
細部のデザインまで
出来る限り忠実に
引き継いで描きたいと
思っております。
剣舞ファンのご期待を
裏切らないようにもう、必死。
後2巻、頑張って参ります～。



Hello, I am Shimesaba Kohada.

Volume 18, the climax approaches! This is my second volume ever since I took over illustrations starting from the previous volume.

There are many characters in Volume 18 that I'm drawing for the first time. In order to grasp the characters, I had to read the previous volumes again and again, trying my best to do a faithful rendition of every detail. I hope I will meet the expectations of every Blade Dance fan.

I will continue to do my best for the next two volumes~